Interview with Virginia Bogardus

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Foreign Service Spouse Series

VIRGINIA BOGARDUS

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

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Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on Tuesday, February 26th, 1991. I am interviewing Virginia Bogardus at her home.

You were about to tell me that when you were married in New York in 1942, during World War II you were a dual national; you were born in the United States of Canadian parents. Since that was your introduction to the Foreign Service why don't we start right there?

BOGARDUS: In New York?

Q: Well, of being a dual national and wanting to marry a Foreign Service Officer during World War II.

BOGARDUS: Well, it had never occurred to me before that I might be likely to become a public charge, as it were. Anyway, my friends at the American Consulate General advised us to be married in the States and then immediately procure a diplomatic passport, which we did. It made for a very small, intimate, wedding because very few of our friends could get to New York City in December from Montreal and other parts in Canada. But we had a very nice, pleasant, wedding and a honeymoon of five days during which there was one of the worst snow storms that I've ever encountered, and I was glad to get back to Canada where it was supposed to be much colder, but wasn't. That was the beginning,

and everything seemed to happen to us in December. We met in December, '41, and we married the next year in December, and our first daughter was born the year after that in December. And my first post abroad, which was Prague, was very auspicious for many reasons, but we also arrived there on December 5th, my daughter's second birthday.

Q: In Prague?

BOGARDUS: Yes.

Q: Could I just ask about Mombasa?

BOGARDUS: I never got to Mombasa. I wrote many letters pleading, and asking if I could possibly go, but obviously it was not meant for me and a small baby to be going out to Mombasa. Well, George was there a very short time in any case, I believe it was just ten or eleven months, not quite a year. He was then drafted. He knew that this might happen and before that he offered his services to the Navy, and they would not accept him because of his eyes. That was a disappointment to him but in any case there he was in Mombasa. He could have been inducted in Asmara, Ethiopia, but he decided to come home to see his wife and child, which he did for six days. And then off he went to Camp Croft, South Carolina. He then had training and was in OSS until the end of the war in the Pacific. We saw each other once or twice during all that time, and Janet didn't really know her father too well.

While he was away I spent most of the time shuttling back and forth to Des Moines, Iowa, to visit my parents-in-law, and then to be with my parents in Montreal. It was a strange beginning for me.

Q: Mostly separations.

BOGARDUS: It was mostly separations for almost two years. And then the war ended, fortunately, and then was the waiting period.

George was in Washington trying to get a job somewhere. He didn't mind where, and actually at that point, nor did I. I thought it would be just wonderful to go anywhere ... little did I know. I believe it was October ...

Q: You missed December on this one.

BOGARDUS: That's right. Well, except for the arrival in my first post. It was October when he learned that we were going to Prague. So quickly I did what I could about learning something about Czechoslovakia. It seemed such a far away place to me then. I knew nothing about it. I knew not one word of Czech, of course. But I could speak German and French so I felt I was fairly well equipped for whatever came. Little did I know that at that point, the Czech people would not speak German, even though it was their second language. They'd had seven years of occupation, and they were not about to discuss anything in German. But I had a little phrase worked up: “I am an American and I'm learning your beautiful language. Could you please in the meantime speak German with me?” “Ah, yeah,” they would say. So everything went fairly smoothly.

At one point I wondered why I was getting some very dirty looks on the tramway, and on the streets, etc., and I said to a Czech friend, whom I'd met at a dinner party, “I don't quite understand. Could you explain to me why I seem to be very unpopular?” And she laughed, and said, “Well my dear, if you would cut that long blond hair (which was wound on the top of my head) and not wear your fur coat, please, on the tramway, I think you would melt into the background, so to speak.” So I said, “Fine. I had no idea ...” it was very cold, it was the coldest winter, '45 and '46 was a terrible winter in Europe, and I really needed my fur coat. But being half Canadian, a fur coat was not a luxury in those days, it was just a necessity, but apparently the Czechs didn't feel that way, the poor things. So I had a cloth coat made, and felt I was melting into the background, so to speak. Then I learned a little more Czech, and could manage to do shopping — not long philosophical conversations with people, of

course, but I could manage, and I could understand it fairly well. So that part was eased up.

Q: You were there for three years?

BOGARDUS: Yes. From '45 to '48, during a most troublesome upheaval ... those poor people were going through a sort of recovery period from a long illness. They had absolutely nothing. The food was virtually nothing. There was nothing to buy in the stores, you could not buy clothes, you could not buy shoes. Well, even straight pins, which I was looking for at one point, were just not available for about a year, and then things began to pick up somewhat. And 1947 was what I would call a fairly good year. We were getting some fresh food. Up to that point we had no fresh fruit, no fresh vegetables whatsoever. Life was not easy but to me it was an absolute education. I had never before conserved anything very much. It never occurred to me, we lived in the land of plenty in Canada, and while we were rationed for certain things, we never went without. So it was a great lesson to me to have the housekeeper, the domovnice's wife, domovnice was the concierge, come upstairs in the kitchen as I was throwing out some coffee grains one morning, and she said, “Oh please, madam, may I have those?” And I said, “Of course, but they've been used. They're not very good.” “Oh,” she said, “yes I will take them. I'll put them on a window sill in the sun, and they'll dry out and I will give them to Mr. Vanichek for his coffee in the afternoon.” That struck me very forcibly, and so from then on I really hate to throw out the coffee grains still to this day.

Q: It made a profound impression, didn't it?

BOGARDUS: It did and we conserved everything, bits of string, bits of paper. It seems foolish now because I can't wait to get rid of the paper bags, but in those days it was very important. We had some marvelous times in Prague. When we first arrived we lived in two different hotels, and I couldn't wait to go home. I sat there and felt very sorry for myself for about two months, and then I decided “this is ridiculous.” I got a baby sitter,

and I went out and explored Prague, got lost twice and had to be picked up by the Czech police, who was very kind and realized I was an American, and set me on my way. But I grew to love Prague, it's a beautiful, wonderful baroque city. I'm looking forward to going back someday, and I hope soon. We were to go back in April but we decided to put it off because of the present dreadful situation. We hope that's over very quickly.

Q: So Prague was recovering, of course?

BOGARDUS: Prague was recovering slowly and well, and we met some wonderful, wonderful people. It's in my bones actually.

Q: You had museums, you had art ....

BOGARDUS: Oh, we had everything.

Q: Flea markets?

BOGARDUS: No, no. What we did have though was a sort of underground flea market, you might call it. People who were really just destitute, but who had beautiful things — Meissen porcelain, wonderful Bohemian glass, and carpets, etc. Unfortunately, they didn't want money for these because there was nothing for them to buy in the way of food or clothing. What they wanted was food. They wanted to trade, and we were not allowed to.

Q: You were not permitted.

BOGARDUS: No. The word came down from above, “no trading, nothing of that sort must take place.” So whatever we acquired in Prague was bought from antique shops, or if we could afford to buy these things that people were offering, and they would take money, then we would pay them with koruny.

There was a very interesting occasion when an elderly lady invited me to tea. I wondered why because we'd really only met twice, and I thought, “She's interested in Americans, or

something.” And I went, and she had masses of crystal, Bohemian crystal, and wonderful porcelain, all of it antique, quite magnificent, in a lovely old apartment, threadbare rugs, that sort of thing. And obviously the poor lady was really down. So finally the talk came around to the fact that she was trying to get rid of her porcelain, and her crystal, and would I be interested in a set for 24 people — a complete set of the most magnificent Bohemian crystal, fluted glasses, stem ware with gold and etched crystal. I said, “It would have looked absurd in our modest little house.” I said, “I don't think I could afford it you know.” And she said, “Oh, well, all I'm asking for is tinned meat and cigarettes.” And I said, “Oh, my dear, I'm very sorry but my husband says no, he's been told absolutely not, we mustn't do that.” She was disappointed, and so was I, but in any case about two months later we were invited to dinner — the person is no longer in the Foreign Service, thank goodness — there was the crystal on the table, there were about 12 people. And it was all there, and I knew it. I recognized it having just been there recently, and many, many rugs piled one on top of the other. I was so angry. I didn't know whether I was more angry at myself for not insisting that we do something to help this woman, or the fact that somebody else had this beautiful thing, and I had thought it was so wonderful. Anyway, I'm glad that ...

Q: It was someone who was older than you, who had been in the Foreign Service ...

BOGARDUS: Slightly older, yes.

Q: ... that could have been a role model — should have been a role model.

BOGARDUS: Yes, precisely. That was perhaps my very first disillusionment about people, and what they did. People whom you thought well of, shall we put it that way. I'm glad that I didn't do it, I'm very glad that I never did it. We did one thing to help people when things became very, very bad, and the situation was just hopeless for the Czech people. We had an English pram for my daughter. It was a beautiful thing, wonderful, burgundy color, it was just grand. It needed a nannie to push it, but never mind. These people needed to get out of Czechoslovakia very badly. They were so anti-communist that it

was most evident. She was English, he was Czech, and they had a little baby, and a nursemaid. Somehow, I don't remember the details of how we got the pram to them, but we gave it to them. They fled. They went on a skiing trip, and, they skied and skied until they had left Czechoslovakia, got into Slovakia and then out. The nursemaid and the baby stayed behind, and she arranged things underneath the pram — there was a whole space where you could put parcels and things — so she put enough for the baby and for herself underneath the pram, put the baby in it as if she were going for a walk as they did everyday. She did this for a week so people would know, but then on the eighth day we'll say, she just simply walked, and walked, and walked until she got out of Czechoslovakia, and we never saw the pram again. But I was pleased about that to think that we had done something, and they all got out.

Q: You feel much better about that ...

BOGARDUS: I do.

Q: ... than you do about the lost crystal.

BOGARDUS: Oh, heavens yes, and what would I do with Bohemian crystal for 24 now? I'd have long since have given it away, or sold it, or something. These were little incidents, and there were many other times in Prague that when I think of them, they were most unusual. Such as the time toward the end when people were no longer having parties as they loved to do. Parties where there was hardly any food, but homemade slivovice to drink, and that sort of thing. Someone said to me, an American said to me, “Now we're having a very important party at our house. Could you do a job for us?” And I said, “What, for goodness sake?” And he said, “I know that you're interested in little theater. Could you pretend to be talking to two of us as if we were just talking about very unimportant things, laughing and smiling.” I said, “Of course.” And he said, “At the same time he and I, the Czech person, will be discussing his getaway.” And I said, “Oh, yes of course, I'll do that.” And so I did, and no one knew and to this day I don't know what they were saying because

I was not listening. I purposely shut my ears to what they were saying actually, and from time to time they would look at me and they would be talking as if to me, but they weren't, they were planning this whole thing. And this man also got out, thank heavens. And I felt that I was doing something in a very strange way to help. We were not allowed to have any farewells when we left. It was already the end of April so the February coup had taken place. The iron curtain had come down, and events were very sad indeed.

Our next door neighbor, who had been very friendly, and very kind to us when we first arrived and finally found a house ... the day after Jan Masaryk was, we think, assassinated — defenestrated, I suppose that's the word — we'd always spoken together every day, and this day I said, “Good morning.” And she looked straight through me, and walked on, and I thought, “Oh, dear, what's happened?” Then I realized that she didn't want to be seen with me because we were the only Americans in this little area where we lived — one other British family lived across the street from us — but without exception we were the only people other than Czechs, and, of course, some of them at that point may have been Communists. I don't know, but they certainly were being very careful, and one never knew. And, of course, we had people following us all the time, we were tailed wherever we went.

Q: Did that bother you?

BOGARDUS: At first, of course, it did, but then I realized that it was really ridiculous. In fact, I got so that I would say, “Dobry Den,” and he would say very sheepishly, “Dobry Den,” and we would go on about our way, but I knew he was always with me somehow or other. A strange little man in a bowler hat. He was so obvious because we lived in the suburbs and there weren't too many people standing about on the corners, but there he was.

One awful thing was, the day the Commies took over I was standing at an open window upstairs in the house, it was a Thursday, and our housekeeper was down in town, and nobody was in the house but my little daughter and I. Suddenly a truck drove up, stopped

in front of our house and two men jumped out with red arm bands and rifles, and I thought, “Oh, my.” I wasn't frightened because I didn't know what it was all about at that point. They opened the garden gate, which should have been locked but it wasn't, they came in and were poking around so I thought, “Oh, what shall I do?” So I said to Janet, “Janet sit quietly at your desk dear. Do not move.” And Janet looked at me with large eyes, and said, “Yes, mommie.” And you know, the child never moved.

She was as if frozen to the spot. I ran downstairs where there was one telephone and it was right in sight of the front door with glass panels on it, and I knew that they could see me, but I telephoned quickly to the embassy, and I asked for George but, of course, he wasn't there. He was down on the town square listening to all the triads and demonstrations. So I said to his colleague, “Please send a jeep or somebody from the embassy. We're being invaded by two men with rifles.” “Oh, well, all right.” So that was all I heard. They never came in the house, but they went all around the house, and they looked in every window. By that time I was becoming a little frightened, and then I saw them go out again, and across the street so I knew they were going to our British colleague. He was the British press attach# and had been in Moscow, and had a lot to do with the Communist world. So I called Peggy very quickly and I said, “You're being visited by people with red arm bands and rifles.” So she brought her little girl in from the garden, and that was the last we heard. I still don't know why they were there, but our concierge, when he came back, paled when I told him that these people had been there. And he said, “Oh, they were looking for me.”

And I said, “No, I don't think so.” “Oh yes,” he said. And I said, “Why would you think so?” “Because about five years ago I said something terrible about the Communists.” “Oh,” I said, “now look, I'm sure they weren't looking for you.” They might well have been, I don't know. Anyhow, that was one of the little things that happened to unnerve me, but I still wasn't really frightened about the whole thing until we actually left there, went to Paris for a little R&R, and then got home and I began to unfold, so to speak, and fell apart for a little

while. I didn't realize. I was too young, and too naive. Today I would be absolutely terrified of anything that smacked of possible terrorism.

Q: Did anything happen to the concierge?

BOGARDUS: No, so far as I know, nothing. When we left we were not allowed to say goodbye to anybody, or to have anyone come to the station to see us off on the train. They thought it was better that we again melted into the crowd. But our dear British friends from across the street, said, “We're not in your embassy, so we're coming down.” So they came. I don't know what it meant to anybody but they came and said goodbye to us.

Q: And the day the two men with the red arm bands were in the garden, did the embassy jeep ever get there?

BOGARDUS: No, no it never did. Nobody ever came and when George came home about 7:00 that evening, I was really in a state at that point thinking something had happened to him. But no, no, he'd just had a fabulous time on the town square, and milling around with crowds, and in the British press office right on the main street and really enjoying it. I hate to say it, but he was enjoying all this. Well, that was his life, he loved it. He still loves it.

Q: And he wasn't concerned that they'd been probing around his garden, and peering in his windows?

BOGARDUS: Well, he didn't know ... when he heard about it, he said, “Oh, good heavens, why didn't someone tell me?” Apparently they didn't tell him. Things were happening right and left, of course, and they were all concerned with dispatches and papers, and what to do about things because it was very obvious what was happening. At one point I was in the car with George and we parked down near the town square, the old town square which is a magnificent square, and there was Gottwald proclaiming his presidency. I sat in the car and George got out of the car to be closer to things, and I did lock the car, but I sat there and then all of a sudden there was a crowd surrounding me — students — they

were not menacing, but they did sit on the front of the car in order to get a better view. And there was I surrounded by all these students. They weren't doing anything to me and again I didn't feel really frightened, but I was a little bit uneasy.

Q: You weren't going to ask them to get off your car.

BOGARDUS: I wasn't going to do anything. I just sat quietly and waited for George to come back. And, of course, they jumped off and we drove away eventually. There were some exciting times indeed. We just heard, sadly, last week that my dearest Czech friend had died two years ago and I did not hear about it. We managed to get her out for 45 days in '64 or '65 while we were in Stuttgart, she came and visited us and almost stayed. Some of our German friends said, “She is such a charming and intelligent woman, and I'm sure she can find a good life here. We will take care of her, we know you're not going to be here all the time, and we'll take care of her.” But at the very last minute she telephoned home and her two children — well, they were in their 20s, I guess by that time — they said, “You have to come back.” She'd had to leave them as hostages, of course, they wouldn't allow all three of them out, her husband had died. So there are some wonderful memories.

Q: That was quite an introduction to the Foreign Service, wasn't it, for you or anybody?

BOGARDUS: Yes, it was. It was exciting, it was very ... the background of it was very esoteric for me. I got a lot more out of it than I realized I was acquiring. I absorbed a great deal. For instance, baroque furniture.

Q: I wanted to ask you earlier about your training in art school ... it must have just opened your eyes.

BOGARDUS: It did. I was always in the museums, and the art galleries, and what few antique shops there were, I just haunted them. I was absorbing all this and didn't realize it. I had grown up with English antiques, and dark mahogany, very correct, and very cold. In fact, I remember as a child saying to my mother after being invited to tea to a school

friend's, that I thought our kitchen furniture was terrible, and why couldn't we have red plastic with ... this is true. And we had this lovely old oak table in the kitchen. If I had it today, I'd be delighted. And mother looked at me in horror, and said, “What! They have red plastic in the kitchen?” So I knew nothing about this baroque furniture until I got to Prague, and there we were surrounded by all these wonderful pieces — that piece in the corner is from Prague, and it's really a lovely little thing. And all the light colored furniture, that was something new to me.

Q: It must have seemed very fanciful after ...

BOGARDUS: Oh yes, and places in the country, castles that we were invited to ... oh, there were some fascinating places. The Kinsky family, one of the oldest of the Czech nobility — European nobility, because they had branches in many countries, Austria, and I imagine Hungary too, I don't know. The Kinskys were wonderful people and they invited us to their castle for a weekend, and it was a marvelous place. He had the old count, who had a long luxurious white beard, a marvelous man, invited us to look at his trophy room, a huge hall, paneled and lined with antlers upon antlers. It was an amazing place. They had sheep dogs — they raised sheep dogs — and they were a wonderful, wonderful family. Well, those two poor old souls were reduced to a couple of rooms in their town palace after the iron curtain came down, and everything was disposed of. I don't know what ever happened to their castle.

The other family whom we visited was Leopold von Sternberk, and you may have read Cecilia's novels — well, they're more than novels, they're more autobiographies — she was very friendly with the Americans, and one in particular. She was a fascinating woman. I believe she was a Hapsburg. I shouldn't say that because I'm not positive, but I believe she was a Hapsburg, and Leopold was a dear soul, not much between the ears, but a very kindly and sweet man. They invited us to their castle in Castolovice in Czechoslovakia. They had a suite of rooms prepared for us for a weekend. My room was done in blue and cream, and it had a four-poster bed with cream colored feathers on the posts. It was

fantastic. And they had a small child's bed ready with monogrammed linen ready for Janet. And George's room was done in reds and gold. Today his room is done in red. He loves it. I think unconsciously he was thinking of Castolovice when I said, “What color would you like to have your draperies?” He said, “Oh, I think red.” So they're paisley.

Anyway, those were times when I must have been absorbing all of this without realizing it. And it's as if I had been there yesterday.

I can remember all the details of what her dining room looked like. The walls were all white-washed and covered with sconces enameled in green, and on each sconce was a Meissen bird, exquisite, just exquisite. And they too had a very sad end and had to leave their castle and come into Prague, and again live in a couple of rooms, a very small apartment next to a monastery. Cecilia's dressing room was right next to the organ loft of the monastery ... it was really too funny. If you went in the dressing room, you'd hear this terrific reverberation of the organ, it was wonderful. They came to the United States actually. They went to Florida, of all places. To me that was the most remote spot they could have chosen, I mean remotely different from Prague, but they stayed there for quite a while. She was in other places too.

Q: You seem to have had great access to Czech friends, and nobility.

BOGARDUS: Oh, they welcomed us with open arms. When we first arrived in Czechoslovakia, even before we had found our house which we had to do by ourselves, by the way, because there was one poor little administrative officer at the time, and he was just inundated with work with all these families coming in. The embassy had been — well, it was a Legation before but it had been raised to an embassy only in, I guess, July and we arrived in December. So we were the first people to arrive with a child, and that was not easy.

Q: What did you do for baby food?

BOGARDUS: Well, I had to do my own, but she was two years old by that time so she was beginning to eat ... she had to eat whatever there was. Every morning I had to stand in line at 6:30 with a little milk can in order to get the milk for her; eggs were non-available. One morning I was standing in line with my milk can and a little Czech lady came out of another line at the next store, and she had a little red and white checked napkin in her hand, and a couple of eggs, and I didn't know what was going on. And she said, “Please, for the child.” And I said, “Oh, how much?” “Oh, no, no.” She would not take money for them, and an egg at that time cost at least a dollar apiece, one egg if you could find it. And here she was offering me these eggs, and I didn't know what to do but I took them because she was insistent. I said, “Where do you live?” I tried to make sure that I could repay her in some way, and she wouldn't tell me. She saw Janet — and Janet was a darling child, very attractive — and I think she thought, “Oh, well, I'd like to do something for the child.” So there were the two eggs. It was amazing.

We could have bought things on the black market. We finally got this marvelous housekeeper, Lida, whom I loved dearly. She now lives in Santa Barbara, and quite nicely, thank you. Lida doted on Janet, and she said, “This is terrible, we should have much more in the way of butter, and eggs, and cream, and all those good things,” those cholesterol-ridden things. She said, “I can get them for you quite easily. You just give me the money.” And I said, “Lida, how much would you have to pay for all this?” Well, she named the sum and I was appalled, and I said, “No, we're not allowed to deal on the black market.” Well, things did ease up a little bit in 1947, we got more coupons, and we could go down to the one store that was assigned to diplomats, and get two sticks of butter for a month, instead of just one. It was all very mind-boggling. But yet we managed to entertain, and we had a lot of fun. We had more fun at parties in Prague than I can remember anywhere because of the camaraderie, the esprit was great. It was just terrific.

Q: At the embassy, or in the community?

BOGARDUS: In the whole diplomatic corps it seemed to me. Yes, we were very frequently together with the Dutch, the British definitely, the French, and many of the other smaller countries, but mostly we were with the Czechs which was the important thing.

Q: That's why you were there.

BOGARDUS: Yes, exactly. There were no restrictions until the iron curtain came down. Then, of course, it was very sad. We were told not to invite them for their sake.

Q: Not to endanger their safety.

BOGARDUS: So it was a terrific education for me, and for George, of course, too, because he'd never lived in such a situation.

Q: His reporting, and everything.

BOGARDUS: He loved every minute of it, and I think probably Prague was one of the best learning centers that he could have had for his work. At the time I never thought of myself as anything else but a Foreign Service wife, and dependent. I hate that word, but there it was.

Q: I think they're getting away from that.

BOGARDUS: Oh, well, long since have I gotten away from that. But at the time I thought this was what we had to do. You must understand that I had never been to Washington, and here I was an American Foreign Service wife. When George entered, I don't believe there was any program for wives. There was nothing set up to tell us just the barest essentials, and while we had a very fine Consul General in Montreal, his wife was a dear, dear lady, an intellectual, a very dear friend of my Latin and Greek professor, and the two of them got together most of the time to discuss intellectual things, and really she paid very little attention to the Foreign Service as such. So I left Montreal absolutely green. I really

knew very little about protocol. I remember saying to my mother, who was a wonderful, sensible, lady, “Mother, I just don't know what I'm going to do.” She said, “Darling, there's no problem. You just behave as you've always ... I think I've brought you up to know how to behave socially. You just be polite, and listen.” Those words, I'll never forget them. She said, “Listen.” And she said, “If you don't know how to do certain things, ask. There must surely be someone in charge of protocol, or the Ambassador's wife might deign to tell you, but don't worry. Just carry on.” And so I did.

Q: You've just said, shortly before we turned off the tape recorder, that you thought of yourself as a Foreign Service wife, and nothing else in those days. And your husband was a young political officer having a wonderful time in Prague at that point. It must have been very fertile ground for him.

BOGARDUS: It was.

Q: And you said that there was a great esprit d'corps. Well, then you must have had good leadership.

BOGARDUS: We did. We really did. Our Ambassador was Laurence Steinhardt. He was a political appointee but he'd had many appointments and so eventually one thinks of him as a career ... yes, he was, to all intents and purposes.

Q: You really got no instruction from the Consul General's wife in Montreal, and your mother said, “I think I've brought you up properly, just be polite and listen.” So that's obviously what you did in Prague.

BOGARDUS: That's what I did, and I asked a lot of questions. But the situation was so strange, and so fraught with all kinds of dire things that I began to think, “Oh, well, this is what life is like in the Foreign Service.” And when we got to our next post, which was Algiers, it was quite a let-down in a way, although Algiers was interesting. I liked it very much. I thought at the time that the climate was terrible, but I realized in retrospect, when

we got to Saigon, that Algiers had been heavenly in comparison. But I loved Algiers because there we met, again, some wonderful people and my very dearest friend, and her husband, arrived. That was their first post. And we're friends still. Algiers was different. There were rumblings, shall we say, it was still under the French.

Q: You were about ten years before the French ...

BOGARDUS: About ten years, yes, but even then there were rumblings. The unfortunate part there was that we did not know Arabs socially, and I'm very sorry about that. I really am. The French dominated, of course, and the only Arabs we really knew were our housekeeper, and domestics. We had a wonderful 18-year old Mauresque girl — Mouina, was her name. She was very beautiful, and very intelligent. She came from a family of eight girls, and four boys, and Mouina wanted to break out of the mold. So she managed to get a job in Algiers, they lived out in the countryside. And she managed to get this job with her sister in a fairly large household, and then she decided that she wanted to be on her own, so the sister went elsewhere, and she came to the Consulate General, and we found her there. So we took Mouina in. She knew very little. She did not know how to cook, so I taught her what I knew, which was very little at the time, and we had a wonderful relationship. So much so that she wanted to come with us.

She wanted to stay with us forever, she said. Well, when we were due to leave Algiers — we were posted to Toronto, of all places — to me that was the end of the world, because being a Montrealer I thought Toronto was not worthy of our ... Anyway, we said to Mouina, “We're very sorry. We would love to take you with us but there's no mosque, you wouldn't like the snow. You wouldn't like anything about Toronto.” I didn't tell her that I probably wouldn't either. She was very upset about that, but she prevailed upon George to the point where he said, “All right, I will speak to your father.” It would have been like having an older daughter to take care of, for me, but I thought, “Well, never mind, we might work it.” So he went to speak with the father, and all the little boys were clustered around. They lived in two rooms, can you believe it? Two rooms in a tiny little place, with a curtain

dividing the two rooms, and the wife was sitting behind in the other room. She was not allowed to talk with George. The father was a road worker, he worked on the roads, and he was very suspicious of George. “He's come here to complain about my daughter. She's in trouble of some sort, and we can't have this sort of thing.” Finally George got around to saying (they spoke in French — George said his French was very good), “Well, monsieur, we would like to take Mouina with us to our next post. We would take very good care of her, I promise you that, and my wife is devoted to her, and my little girl loves her.” He was horrified. He said, “Where are you going?”

And George said, “To Canada.” “Oh,” he said, “she might even marry one of those Canadians.” From his point of view that was a terrible thing, we were infidels, and why should he let his daughter go with us? So, of course, poor Mouina ...

Mouina stayed, of course, and when we left she promised to write to us. As I said before, she was highly intelligent for a young Arab girl who had not had much opportunity to go out in the world. But she could write. We finished with Toronto, thank goodness, and we were in Hamburg and somehow she had traced us, and we got this letter from Mouina saying, “I am now 21,” or whatever it was, “I would like to come to you. I could come.” In other words, to heck with my father and his ideas. We talked it over, again, and we thought this would be terrible for her. Suppose she came to Hamburg, there would be no one with whom she could converse except us. But I've always thought to this day, perhaps we were quite wrong. We should have done it. We should have accepted her very generous offer to come to live with us. We never did, and I'm sorry, and I hope Mouina is happy today, who knows.

We always thought of Algiers as a sort of R&R post because we did relax. There was a lot of work to be done, of course, for George but there was very little for me to do except enjoy life. We did a bit of archeological digging in Algeria.

Q: Was he a political officer?

BOGARDUS: Yes, he was. He was again number two. Our Consul General was George Tait, a wonderful man, married to a British woman from Cheshire. Margery Tait became Auntie Margery to our children, and was a wonderful person, I loved her dearly. Looking back, probably that was my first assignment, shall we say, in interior design, because George had been in charge for a long time and we were to have our new Consul General, and would I please do something about the residence?

Not to decorate it, because it had been done by a French woman from Rabat. I thought, Margery being British, and at this point a Londoner is not going to like a lot that's being done here. So I made notes of what I thought would be changed, and could be changed. For instance, each room was done in a different color scheme, but very set. For instance, you had a yellow room, and you had a blue room, and whatever, and to me this just was too static.

Q: So that wasn't that marvelous old residence?

BOGARDUS: It was. It was beautiful.

Q: Oh, yes. I had lunch there.

BOGARDUS: It is lovely.

Q: Exquisite. I don't know if we still have it, or not. It's a shame if we don't.

BOGARDUS: I think so, yes, I believe we do. Montfeld, it was called, and it had a wall of wisteria in front — beginning at the front door and all the way around, as I recall. It was just beautiful. So anyway, when Margery came, she said before she had even taken her coat off — we met them at the dockside, and took them up to their residence, and Margery took one look, and she said, “Oh, good heavens, that's got to come down.” It was the first thing I'd put on my list, and I was so thrilled. You might say that was my first job. As we went through the rooms she would say, “What can we do with this?” So I said, “You know, Mrs.

Tait, if you don't mind my saying so, I think we should take that cover off the mantle piece." They had a drapery over the mantle which was marble and beautiful in itself. I said, "Why don't we take that off." And she said, "Oh, good, just put it anywhere." So we took that right away. She was still in her coat, and we took it off and put it under the table, and already it was better. Then she said, "These colors are so strange. I love yellow, and I love blue, but I don't see why we can't put them together." And I said, "Why can't we?" So we mixed things. We took a brown covered — I remember it was brown satin — and we took it from one room and put it in another, and immediately it was an accent piece. I've never had so much fun in my life. It was terrific.

Q: You said it was your first job. As a volunteer?

BOGARDUS: Yes, oh yes, of course. But you see at the time I didn't realize what I was doing. I had no idea that in the future I would become an interior designer. In fact, there was nothing there to suggest that I could be, except my studies that I'd done before. And I had taken a course in interior design long before I was married, but that was just for fun. So, here we were doing all these wonderful things in this beautiful villa. It really is a lovely place.

And then there was another villa which our government had bought. It was called Mustapha Rais, and it was across the street from where we lived. We lived next door to the Hotel Saint George in a very lovely old villa, and the other was intended to be a U.S. library. They never did anything with it so far as I know, certainly not while we were there. But there it was in all its glory, and it had a garden that to me was like a secret garden. It was just wonderful. Janet and I used to walk there almost every afternoon, and we would find snake skins, having been shed on the bushes. It was a wonderful place, and there was an old gardener who still looked after things and he knew us and so he would let us wander through the villa. And one day, Janet came running back to me, and she said, "Mommie, mommie, there's a whole lot of furniture in here." So, of course, I being a

furniture aficionado, I said, “Oh, goody,” so in we went and here was this marvelous set of wire-back French furniture — two sofas, and many chairs, but in very great disrepair.

So I said to George, “To whom does that belong?” And he said, “I don't know, I suppose it belongs to us now. We bought the whole place, but I don't know what we're going to do with it.” So he asked the Consul General, and they sent someone over and they inspected it, and then they started a search to find out who actually owned it. They found out it had been used in General Eisenhower's Hotel Saint George suite while he was there, and that he had used all of this furniture. So they'd just transported it across the road to the villa when the war was over. Nobody seemed to know who had actually owned it originally. They asked every Consulate General, they asked everybody and nobody knew anything about it. So our Consul General said, “Why don't we divide it between those who need furniture.” At that point we had a tiny little settee in this huge room, so I said we could use a sofa, and it's sitting right behind you in the living room to this day. That is the sofa that was originally covered in a peach brocade in ribbons.

All the other families took a piece, or two pieces, or whatever they needed, so it was wonderful. I don't think anyone else to this day has kept any of it, but I kept that because it had historical connections. And its been reupholstered three or four times since then.

Q: Do you have photographs of your house, of the interior?

BOGARDUS: I should have gotten something ready.

Q: Because I would love to put those in your file.

BOGARDUS: I can find some I'm sure, of the various places, I think. Nothing of Prague, unfortunately. We had a funny little house in Prague. It was very strange. It had, for instance, in front of the window, it would have two steps up, not big enough to put a sofa or even a table in, and another little alcove, a very odd house. But it had a twelve-foot swimming pool. It was very short on real practicality, but it did have a swimming pool.

Q: That must have been lovely in Prague at that time.

BOGARDUS: And it had a grape arbor which was marvelous. I think I do have pictures of the exterior, the garden, which we discovered. You see, it must have been January or February, and it wasn't until the end of March or the beginning of April that we saw the daffodils, just marvelous daffodils all over the place in this old garden. And then the roses, and then the lilacs. The whole garden was surrounded by lilac trees, it was lovely.

Q: So then after Algiers when you had that wonderful introduction to your future, were you able in other posts to do things to the residences?

BOGARDUS: Yes. Well, every place we ever lived in, I painted it including ceilings, from top to bottom. I would leave a place looking a little better, I think, than when we had found it. To me it was a fascinating challenge, and I couldn't wait to get to a new post for that reason. Of course, the euphoria was fairly quickly diminished when we really got down to business and started living and working, and doing the normal things.

Q: Did you prefer to find your own house, or did you prefer a government house?

BOGARDUS: Based on what we did in Prague, I think I would have preferred to look about and find our own place, but unfortunately by that time the State Department had decided that housing would be designated, so we were usually put in some place. Toronto was a nice house, it was a charming Canadian house which I loved, and we enjoyed that very much. It's still there today exactly as it was in the Rosedale section of Toronto which I really loved. And lest anyone think that I did not like the Torontonians, they were wonderful to us. They were absolutely marvelous to us, and they were so hospitable, and eventually I got into things — women's groups, etc. And I enjoyed that part of it. We learned Scottish reels, in preparation for the St. Andrew's Ball, and were members of a Discussion Group.

Q: It would be a little bit like being a New Yorker, and being assigned to Chicago, or St. Louis.

BOGARDUS: Exactly. Now today it would not be so because Toronto is fantastic. We've been back there since and I didn't recognize it. It's a big city now, but it wasn't then. It was like a lot of little provincial towns strung together, and there were no really good restaurants, nothing like that. Everybody entertained at home, which, of course, is very nice and it was well done, too, I must say. But there wasn't much of a cultural life. In fact, when the New York Ballet came, everybody went into an absolute flap because the Ballet was coming. You'd think no one had ever been to a ballet before and much was made of that. I can't remember any symphony orchestra at the time, there must have been, but I don't recall — that was 40 years ago.

I must say though, that healthwise things began to disintegrate and I think it was a very delayed reaction to the other posts that had gone before. I really think so.

Q: Not enough stress in Toronto.

BOGARDUS: Exactly, and our second daughter was born there, and I went through about six months of postpartum depression, and I'd never had anything like that in my life. I'd always been a very happy person, and very full of ...

Q: ... positive.

BOGARDUS: Yes, very positive, and also very energetic because in Montreal I taught school, I was in the Montreal Repertory Theatre, and the Trinity Players for eight or nine years, and was always busy and never thought anything of it. But I guess it began to take its toll, all this back and forth, packing, unpacking, uncertainty, waiting for the next post, and all of that sort of thing. And always at one end of it, so to speak, the end that took care

of all the details, the so-called minor details, settling in, making sure that the education was right for the children, the schools were right, etc.

Q: I would put “minor” very much in quotes.

BOGARDUS: Yes, yes I do indeed, I really do. I remember Janet's first day at school in Toronto. Now you see we'd come from Algiers where she'd been in a French school, lycee, the only school available, and was completely bilingual in French. So her first day of school in Toronto was disastrous. She came home in tears, and I said, “Janet, what is the trouble, dear?” She said, “I'm never going to speak French again.” “Oh, now come, why do you say that?” She said, “They laughed at me, and the teacher even smiled and said 'we say this, or that' because I answered her in French, I didn't think.” Poor child, you know. I said, “Oh, well, we just won't think about French for a while.” But I knew that eventually she'd come back to it if we gave the right background to it. And eventually she did, and her French is beautiful today at age 47, she speaks beautiful French so that was all right. It was just a little minor incident, but to her it was devastating.

Q: It was major.

BOGARDUS: And that was one of the things. There were a lot of other things too that really, I think, made me very exhausted, and I didn't realize why I was exhausted. But the bright thing was that finally we got a new post, Hamburg. And I thought, “Oh, anything to get out of here.” Even though I had become very entrenched with many Canadian friends — amazing enough, not so many from the Consulate, they were good friends, two of them we see today still. It was the Canadians who made it possible for us. But Hamburg. Here was a new thing, this was only 1954, not too long after the war, and even though I had German great grandparents, I was a little bit upset about this. I thought, “How will we find it in Germany? Will we be with the German people? I hope so. Will we be able to feel comfortable about this whole thing,” because I remembered seeing Munich in 1946. We were in Prague and I was ill and had to be taken to the American military hospital

in Munich, and I remember the rubble. I remembered the horrible ghastly appearance of everything in Munich. It was beyond belief. And I also remembered the faces on the people. They looked straight through us, they paid no attention. They were at their worst. I felt very upset about this.

However, we arrived in Hamburg, and I immediately thought, “Oh, here is another wonderful city. I can't wait to explore it.” It's a marvelous city, it's alive, bustling. The whole atmosphere is just wonderful, I think. So that was great, and they gave us this wonderful house to live in. I can show you pictures of that. It was absolutely lovely. It was an old — I suppose about 1890 — mansion, three stories, four with the basement, a beautiful garden, and it had been divided into three apartments — huge apartments. If someone had said to me when we were moving just last year, “Would you like to move to that apartment in Hamburg?” I would have said “yes” immediately. It was wonderful. At that time we had very little furniture. I hadn't started to collect things with such a great passion. We should have had what we have now in that place, it would have been great. We enjoyed it. The girls went to a British school, the British military school, and both came out of there with English accents. It was really quite amusing.

We weren't there long enough, really, to suit me. I just got the living room draperies hung, and they said, “You're going back to Washington,” not back, but to Washington for the very first time in our career.

Q: And you'd been in the Foreign Service 14 years at that point.

BOGARDUS: Yes. I had been in Washington after we were married, of course, to visit George on his little leaves from the OSS. Anyway, we arrived in Hamburg, and I loved it, and I did not want to leave. However, we came back to Washington, and found ourselves complete nonentities, of course. I don't know how it is today with the young officers and their wives, but in those days it was quite a blow because up to that point we had been

privileged people, and I realized it with full force that we were just simple FSOs, with dependents still. I was still very much a Foreign Service wife, and dependent.

Q: That was 1956. That's exactly when I came in the Service.

BOGARDUS: Is it! Oh, really. I began to explore Washington. I thought it was fascinating, and I loved it. The girls were off in school, both of them at this point until about 3:30 or 4:00 in the afternoon, so I had not enough to do. We lived in this tiny house on Davenport Street in the District, and I couldn't stand it. It was so small we didn't have enough elbow room. So I thought, something has to be done, and in order to have a larger house, and obviously space and a garden, etc., it would cost more money, and we didn't have it. So I thought, “Well, I can get a job. I can get a part-time job.” One day I was down at the Savile book shop, which is no longer in existence, on P Street in Georgetown. I went in there actually to buy a book, but I started looking at the shelves and I noticed that they had travel books with philosophy, everything was mixed up. It was a terrific jumble. So I said to the young man who was there, “Do you have a manager, or who is in charge here?” “Oh,” he said, “Donald Downs,” sort of whispery. “May I speak to Mr. Downs?” “Well, yes, I guess so,” he said. He seemed to be very wary of all this. So Donald Downs came out. What a character. A marvelous man, with a huge cigar in his mouth, “What can I do for you?” I said, “Well, Mr. Downs ...” and this is the first time in my life that I can ever remember being so bold. I said, “It isn't what you can do for me, but I think I could help in your shop.” “What do you mean?” he said. “I've done some library cataloging, etc.” “Oh?” “Yes, and I think I could help. I think you need help here.” The young man had fortunately left so I didn't feel that I was insulting him. And Donald said, “I'll take your name, etc.” So he took down my name, and all the notes, and he said “Saturdays, of course.” I said, “No, absolutely I couldn't possibly work on Saturdays. I have to be home with my children, and I have to be home by 3:00” That didn't please him.

And he said, “I'll think about it.” And I thought, “Oh, well, that's it. I'll never hear from him.” I got home, the telephone was ringing, “This is Donald Downs. Can you come in?”

“Yes.” “You mean to work?” “Yes, what else,” says he. So I said, “Yes, of course, but no Saturdays.” “Oh, no Saturdays.”

Well I started working the very next day. When I told George, he said, “I don't believe this.” And I said, “Yes, and what's more I have found a house on Garrison Street with a 'for rent' sign.” “Oh,” he said, “You're impossible.” That was really the first time when I began to feel that I was an individual, and that I had certain rights, and certain needs to fulfill myself. We looked at the house, and it was a charming house on Garrison Street, a lovely old colonial, solidly built, and just perfect for us with four bedrooms, two bathrooms. So we rented it, and I had my job, and the girls hardly knew that I was working because I left after they did, took the bus at the corner, got to the streetcar, took the streetcar — the tram — down to P Street, and was there in time to start working. I took the streetcar home, and I was home before they were. So it was wonderful, it worked out beautifully, and I made a magnificent sum of almost nothing, but I didn't care. I wasn't really in it for the money so much as for myself. And I made friends there whom I still have today, and one of those friends is Sue Murick, and I loved Sue. She is just a wonderful person. And the other one was Irene Underwood, whom you may have met. We're still very good friends. So all of these things started in very small ways to germinate, and then, of course, we were sent to Vietnam in 1959.

Q: Excuse me, we'll go on to Saigon because I'm very interested in it. But do you think the situation in the Foreign Service of being a dependent spouse, of being obligated to anyone who outranked you, do you think that had something to do with your need to somehow, once you got back to Washington, to express yourself?

BOGARDUS: Very possibly, I'm not sure.

Q: Well, I'm not sure too.

BOGARDUS: Well, I'm not sure too because I've never really sat down and said, “I did this because of that, or I began thinking in this way.”

Q: You see, we haven't gotten to the feminist era yet. This is Eisenhower 1950s.

BOGARDUS: Oh, yes, of course.

Q: I'm interested because, as I said, that's when I came into the Service. I had two small children, and you were about 15 years ahead of me at that time, and you came back to Washington and instead of getting involved in AAFSW — well, AAFSW didn't even exist in those days. There was just a social group that met at Fort McNair for lunch.

BOGARDUS: That's right. I did go to that several times before I took this job. I had done so much welfare work in every post that I thought, “I've done my bit.” We did join Westmoreland Congregational Church where we're still members, and I did a stint there, nothing very much but I did what I could.

Q: But you threw yourself into the book store.

BOGARDUS: Yes, I did, and I could recite all the titles of the classics, and the publisher's dates, etc., and I knew everything right on my fingertips. The day after we left you couldn't have asked me, and I wouldn't have been able to answer any question. It was just because I was there, and I was with it all the time.

Q: And this was before computers.

BOGARDUS: This was before computers. We had a really ancient method of selling books, and I wrote everything in longhand, nothing was typewritten. I was in charge of receiving the books, so I had to be very certain of how they were selling, and I had to catalogue everything and file it. And then I had to go in early before anybody else and make sure that we had enough copies for that week, and reorder. It was an ongoing thing

just keeping your eyes on everything, and how things were selling, and what was not selling, and rearranging the tables, and that sort of thing. And then ordering children's books, I did quite a bit of that. Then sometimes at noontime they would ask me to take over from whoever was sitting at the desk, and actually take charge, etc., and I hated that because all the diplomats would come in on their lunch hour — well, of course, and I'd have to work all that out. But nothing, not even a calculator.

Q: I was going to say, we didn't even have calculators in those days.

BOGARDUS: No, nothing, just my very poor brain, my almost nonexistent mathematical brain. I just have no feel for mathematics.

Q: I'm exactly the same way.

BOGARDUS: Are you? I'm glad to hear that. I was afraid of numbers for a long time until I started my business, and then my husband said, “You have to do this. You have to be very careful. Here's your new calculator, and use it.” So I do, but I frequently make mistakes. Fortunately, I bill my clients for too little, rather than too much, and sometimes I forget to send out bills.

Q: But probably there again you built on that Savile book store experience when you got into your own decorating business.

BOGARDUS: That's right, oh yes.

Q: So you were here for two years.

BOGARDUS: It was '56 to '59, three years. I remember when I told Mr. Downs that we would be leaving, and that I would have to leave, “Oh, I'm sorry.” By that time we were good friends, and he said, “I don't think you should be going out there, and taking your children.” And I said, “Well, I have to.” I was still a Foreign Service wife.

Q: No separate maintenance allowance, no rationale for having to stay behind.

BOGARDUS: Oh, no. I'd had enough of that.

Q: That was early, that was '59. A little bit like Algiers, there were rumblings ...

BOGARDUS: There were rumblings, but nothing big. Nothing explosive. Of course, it had been comparatively peaceful ...(End of tape 1)

... enrollment she had someplace in Switzerland with plenty of money apparently put by. Whereas many Vietnamese had nothing and were wiped out completely. But we know some others who've come here and had a very nice life, others who went to Paris and lived quite sumptuously. Why not? And I think that the boat people who have come here deserve every bit of help that we can give them. They've had their problems and I know that some segments of our people feel that its unfair that they've taken over certain jobs that they'd always done, but if they can do them, and do them well, why not. And the children are marvelous in school. They're quite remarkable, highly intelligent. I loved the Vietnamese people. That was the one thing while I was there that kept me going because I really and truly loved the people. They were charming, and our friends were good people, and it was quite an experience to be friends with an Asian ... particularly for me to be friends with an Asian woman. It was an experience because they don't think as we do. They don't live as we do, or didn't at the time, and are quite subservient to their husbands in some ways. For instance, we would have ladies' tea parties in which some of the Vietnamese women would become quite lively, and we would exchange shoes to see who had the smallest feet, that sort of nonsense.

And I remember one afternoon having tea at a lady's house, her husband was a banker, and the bank was downstairs and this beautiful apartment was upstairs, and we were all assembled there, a number of Americans and some French, and Chinese. And we all started exchanging shoes, it was too funny for words. So there we were sitting, some of

us in bare feet because one didn't wear stockings — very few wore stockings in Saigon — and all of a sudden Monsieur whatever emerged from the elevator and oh, you should have heard the “oh, oh, oh,” “bonjour Monsieur,” and they were immediately quiet, all the Vietnamese ladies. They never said another word after that. They put their shoes on — it was quite funny. And it showed me the difference, really between this obeisance to the menfolk.

Q: Well, of course, they had no other alternative. I mean that was their survival.

BOGARDUS: Now the Chinese women, on the other hand — the Chinese who were Vietnamese citizens — seemed to have a little more independence. There was one wonderful lady there whose husband owned a textile factory, and he was a great figure in Cholon, the Chinese district. She was quite amazing because she would supply the American Women's Club, the welfare group, with bolts of cloth for the Vietnamese, the peasants, or anyone who'd been burned out — if a whole village was burned out — if one house goes, then the whole village goes with the thatched roofs, etc. She always came forth with whole bolts of textile so we could take them and have them made up into their pajamas, or whatever it was they wore. Her friend was Dr. Wong who took care of the blind children. So there was a lot of different thinking, more like the American way of thinking and doing among the Chinese. And they were much more entrepreneurs than the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese were sweet and kind, and gentle.

I remember going to antiques shops — that was my pet thing to do because it kept my mind busy, and it kept my eyes busy, and I loved it — and I would go to these Vietnamese shops, and if it was still not 4:00 the Vietnamese owner might be sleeping on his doorstep, and he would open one eye and say, “Entrez, madame.” And I could go in and look around.

The Chinese, on the other hand, would practically trip you up. “Ah, bonjour madam,” madam is the way they pronounce it. And, “entrez, and here is this,” and “have you seen

this?” Very much the entrepreneur. And then there were Indian traders from India who had mostly textiles, and shoes — well, not really the kind of shoes that we would wear, but sandals and that sort of thing. And they were very insistent. They just insisted that you buy, and were quite annoying in ways. But the Vietnamese people were quite gentle, those we knew anyway.

Q: Did you stay until the end of that tour? Or did you leave at some point?

BOGARDUS: Actually we volunteered to stay for a second tour, all together four and a half years.

We stayed, but I could not wait to get to Stuttgart because, at that point, we knew we could speak German, we knew that we would enjoy Germany, and a different part of Germany altogether. It's totally different from Hamburg. So from the very outset we loved it, and made some very dear friends. We still call each other once a month, my friend Madeleine Schweitzer calls me, and then I call her the next month and we chat. And an interesting thing, she just called last week and she said, “Ginny, I have to tell you. My friend Richard says that I'm to call you and say that we Germans are all on your side in this terrible thing. We're on your side, and don't pay attention to your silly newspapers that are playing up the demonstrations.” I said, “Well, dear, we've been in a demonstration ourselves. We went to the Cathedral, and we marched to the White House.” And I said, “It apparently didn't do any good but we don't demonstrate any more because we can't. Our troops are there and we can't do it.” But I said, “Our hearts are thinking of this terrible thing, and we don't want to demonstrate any more because it's counterproductive.” But I said, “You're dear to call, and I'm happy to know that you think this way.” “On the other hand,” I said, “maybe I can do something on my side by telling people that while Germany is not sending any troops it is because we, the allies imposed your constitution on you, and it says that you don't send troops except to defend your own country.” “Well that's right,” she said, “but we are sending some money.” I said, “I know you are. You're sending perhaps what you can. Maybe you could send more. We understand. You have a terrible problem on your hand

there.” And she said, “Do we ever. It is very difficult for everybody now. The people in the East they just want everything now. They want it pronto.”

Q: They were deprived so long.

BOGARDUS: That's it. She said, “I have said to certain people who have come and have visited me, and whom I knew years and years ago when I was a child, I said to them, we seem to have a lot compared with you, but we've worked for it. First of all the Americans helped us in such a huge way. But we've done something with that help. We haven't squandered it.” And it's true. I've never seen any country like Germany that has worked so hard to fulfill a dream, I suppose. Oh, and I said, “And I can help perhaps on this side too by saying that I had absolutely no fear of Germany uniting and being such a strong body again that we would ever have a recurrence of the horrors of World War II.” And she said, “Well, that's good because I think the people are afraid of us, and they needn't be really. The fact is that we don't want to send any troops, we don't want to fight. We really do not want to be a military country anymore.” It's interesting, isn't it? When you hear these things directly from a German person who is highly intelligent, and very well versed.

Q: We're getting back to your interior designer career and moving it a little bit forward.

BOGARDUS: Again, we moved twice in Stuttgart from one house to another — fortunately from one level of the compound to another. I had done both houses, I had put wallpaper up, and I had painted, etc. Then everybody else was complaining about their curtains, or lack of this, or lack of that, so we talked with the administrative officer and he said, “Well, this is what we have to do. We have to use American fabrics, we have to use everything American.” It seemed to me that that was a rather foolish thing because what we were being shown was not very attractive. It was not top of the line, or even middle of the line. But somehow I said, “Perhaps we could take these samples and why don't I try to make little packages of different choices, maybe three or four choices.” So we did a gold and green, or a blue and gold, or whatever, and I put them together and people seemed to

appreciate that so they could make their choices more easily. I suppose that was one of my first little unprofessional projects, of course, because there was no money involved but I did give some advice. And then from time to time I have helped people with their houses.

When I came back here, and decided that I had to do something again — had to do something for myself, but there being no more Savile book shop — I thought, “No, it has to be something even more artistic.” So I took a course in interior design at the New York School of Interior Design, and then a very dear friend, who is an artist, said, “I wish you'd stop talking about this, and just do it.” And I said, “Where do I begin? I know about the artistic part of it, but I have no head for business whatsoever.” So she gave me a lot of good pointers, and then she said, “I'd like to have you do two rooms for me,” which I did and it turned out very nicely, mainly because she knew what she wanted, and really steered me in the right direction. And she had a series of little parties, and invited her friends — her tennis playing friends.

And within two weeks I had my first job, and I was terrified because this nice lady called and said, “I'd like you to do my whole house.” And I said, “Oh!” I was just petrified. And I said to Ruth, “Just see what you've gotten me into. Where do I begin.”

So we opened an account with Schumacher, dear old Schumacher & Company, and they were so gracious, and so good to me. And then I opened an account with Greeff Fabrics, and then it just went on from there. And then I started building up my sources, and before I knew it I was really in business, and that was 22 years ago. I was 50 years old when I finally got around to doing something that was entirely mine. Then I graciously allowed my husband to be a partner, if he wanted to, by calling it “Bogardus Interiors.” So he has power of attorney should he have to sign a check, and whatnot. And he often confers on colors, he's very good on color, and he's very good on scale which I am not. He's always there for answers, and he's interested. The main thing is that my dear George thought this was such an unique thing, that here was Ginny actually doing something on her own. Not like the Savile book shop which had been just a temporary thing, but this was something

that I could do forever as long as I can see colors, and walk, and get around, I'm going to do it. I've never been without a client. At the moment I have four projects going, and I love it. But it's a big headache sometimes.

Q: It must depend on your client too.

BOGARDUS: Oh, it does indeed. But I must say I've been blessed with wonderful, wonderful clients. They've been so good. I would say for the most part, people with taste, which is a very nice thing, a plus for them and for me because it's a challenge. I have to really meet their taste. I have to interpret what they want, not what I want. So I think I've done that pretty much. I like to do any type of decorating, and most of the time I find myself answering questions as to where to get this, or where to get that. And George says I should be more businesslike about that, but I can't possibly. I just say, “Oh, well, why don't you try this, or that,” and nothing comes of it for me but that's all right.

Q: Maybe sometimes it does.

BOGARDUS: In some ways, yes. To me, the fact that a client will call me at 9:00 at night and say, “Oh, I'm sorry to disturb you,” and I thought, “something is wrong.” But she just wanted to tell me, once again, that the wallpaper and the border are absolutely marvelous, and what's more ...

Q: At 9:00 at night.

BOGARDUS: Yes. She said, “What's more I'm going to confess to you that the number one choice that you made of everything together, is so perfect.” And I said, “But that's not the fabric we got.” She said, “Oh, I know, I know, and I love that too and it's going to work out beautifully.” But she said, “You were right. I should have taken the other.” So I said, “All right, you like it so much now, why don't we just continue in the library, and we can work it in there somehow.” So she's very happy, both ways.

Q: I wonder if working with embassy and consulate wives over the years was another experience that helped develop your ability to deal with clients.

BOGARDUS: I think so. I think you're absolutely right. I think I would not have known how to if I hadn't dealt with Ambassadors' wives, Consul Generals' wives, etc., and some contemporaries of my own. I learned a lot unconsciously. I wasn't trying to, but I just did. And I also have a great empathy for how Foreign Service people live, and how some of us have to conserve money and do not have huge amounts to spend on decorating. It can be very, very expensive. It can be quite devastating. But, on the other hand, it's something that you live with and it's not something that you're going to change every week. Sometimes it's a lifetime.

Q: So it's really important for you to be sensitive to what people want.

BOGARDUS: And sometimes they don't know what they want.

Q: That must be tricky.

BOGARDUS: That is, but that is the fun part of it too because I've had people say to me, “Don't show me anything in blue. I just can't stand it.” And we end up with a room that has quite a lot of blue in it. People sometimes really don't know what they should like. It's not because they don't have taste, or haven't been exposed to it. It's simply because they're too busy doing other things. It's mostly people who have full-time professions, or jobs, that want me to take over and do it with a few little suggestions from them. But the person who is in her house a lot of the time usually has a lot to say about it, and I appreciate that, it should be that way.

I think one of the funniest jobs I ever had was when I had finished I thought to my satisfaction anyway, they said, “Oh, now we need paintings.” And I said, “Oh, well I thought you had quite a bit of art stashed away.” And they said, “Oh, no, not really. We need a sofa size picture, and I didn't know what that was. I said, “What sofa?” “Well, the

one you just reupholstered." "Oh," I said, "Do you really want the big one like that? Why don't we find something else that you have, and make an arrangement." So we found some perfectly lovely prints that they didn't think much of because they were small. But we made an arrangement of them, and they looked great because they were real, they were good, and they were not just something that you buy to fill up a space. But you meet all kinds of people. I think mostly, as I said, greatly blessed with my clients. They're wonderful people.

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Continuation of interview, March 26, 1991

BOGARDUS: The artistic background that I had was not a definite aim. In other words, I did not say to myself at age 15, 16, "I want to be an interior designer someday," because very few people employed interior decorators, as they would be called then. And there were probably no more than two or three at the most in Montreal when I was a teenager. There were a few courses that one could take, but they didn't lead to anything definite. So that was something that didn't occur to me that I could be, or do, until I began my absorption — let's call it that — of wonderful furniture, wonderful colors, patterns, textiles, all sorts of things that I found in Europe, particularly in Prague, and on visits to Italy and France. And I began to be very, very interested in the decorative arts, still not saying to myself, "Oh, someday I'm going to be a designer," because it didn't occur to me that I could do anything on my own. I was already a wife and mother, and very much involved with the life that was going on around us, particularly in Prague.

I'm speaking now of my first post because that's when it all began, and I loved Czechoslovakia after the first four months when we lived in two different hotels, and I sat there weeping and saying, "I want to go home to mother." And my husband said, "Well, dear, you can't go home this week, there's only one plane and it doesn't leave until next week, but I think by then you'll begin to like it." Which I did, and once we got ourselves a

house, and a garden, and room for our child to play in, life was quite different. And then we got to know some Czech neighbors, and then this wonderful woman appeared from the embassy. Her cousin worked in the embassy, and she was a dear, dear person, Lida. And Lida came to us in the clothes she owned, the only clothes she owned — her very best, all pressed and mended.

Q: This was in ...

BOGARDUS: This was in the winter of '46 — February '46. Lida helped us to move into the house which we found, and she took over literally — took over our lives — and I'm eternally grateful to her. She was a wonderful person. She loved our little girl, Janet, and Janettka was her child from there on in and I could never raise my voice to her, or do anything, and Lida would come to her aid. Janet loved her, too, so that was a nice thing.

Q: That gave you freedom too to prowl through the flea markets.

BOGARDUS: Yes it did. It gave me freedom to get lost many times in Prague, and to exercise my very small knowledge of Czech by saying, “I'm an American,” as if they couldn't tell, and be told where to go by the very kind policemen. So life went on like that. I was absorbing all this without really knowing it, and much of it has just stayed with me. It's there in my mind, and I can pull it out when I need it, and it's just wonderful. The study of Biedermeier furniture started there, and baroque furniture of which we have several examples. I really began to love our life there.

On the other hand, around the end of 1947, the political situation was very bad, and Czech friends of ours would come and tell us about what was happening in the background, and underground. And it was not a happy thing. Then, of course, the various things that happened — the terrible things that happened — to Jan Masaryk, whom we knew, and had a very interesting time with. I remember especially one day at luncheon, he said, “Now I'm going to play the piano.” And we all said, “How wonderful.” So he sat down, and he played, and we sang, and then we listened to his very good skills at the piano. And then

he sat down again beside me, and another friend, and he said, “You know, I do not want to go to New York next week (or next month I imagine it must have been — the timing is a little off now).” And we all said, “Why not?” He said, “Because I'm not a diplomat. I'm not a politician. I'm just a man who loves the ladies, and loves to play his piano, and I would like to sit here forever with all of you.” We thought that was very funny at the time, but later, of course, when the poor man was assassinated, as surely he was — tossed from the window — in the good old Czech defenestration method, as with the nobles three centuries before. Then things were really bad indeed. Things were sad, and bad, and no one knew what to think, or do, and we had to be very careful not to involve our Czech friends with us socially any more because this would be very bad for them.

I can't remember if I've already told you about the last party that we attended, and I was asked if I would play a little part in helping someone get out of Czechoslovakia?

Q: The baby carriage.

BOGARDUS: That, yes, and the other little bit of acting at the party pretending that I was talking, and actually I was just mumbling and smiling, and these two men with whom I was talking supposedly, were plotting their getaway, and I was able to help them in that way. Well, so much for Prague. I have a little piece from the Des Moines Sunday Register, May 18, 1948 in which I was interviewed by the local radio station, and a lot was said here that perhaps I've said to you too, I don't know, but it might be interesting.

Q: (looking at photos) Let's include that in your file. A lovely picture.

BOGARDUS: Yes, that's our Janet.

Q: Yes, let's include that. I don't want to get them mixed up. Do these go back in that envelope? I'll put these chronologically as you give them to me.

BOGARDUS: This one picture is of our house in Prague. It was a stately looking house, but rather small inside because it had little cut-out places with two steps up and not enough space to put anything when you finally got up the two steps. It was very weird, but charming in its way. Oh, and it had a newel post that was quite frightening and Janet was so frightened of it that we had to cut it down, or take it off. It was a Chinese — I suppose a foo dog — but it had an especially nasty face, and it had a little lamp shade over it. Can you imagine a newel post ... and it had a light, you could light it, turn it on which was really very handy in a way because you could do it from upstairs, or downstairs, and there you'd be lighted on the way down. But Janet just hated it so much that we asked the owner of the house if we couldn't take it out, and he was horrified that we didn't like it.

And this is a picture of Janet smelling the flowers.

Q: Isn't that sweet? That's very sweet.

BOGARDUS: I think that's an especially darling picture of her.

Q: In your garden?

BOGARDUS: Yes, in our garden in Prague. And this is a picture of the late Count Sternberk, and his fine white leghorns in the background at Castolovice in Czechoslovakia. That was their castle in the country. They had restored it by the time we got there. They had just finished restoring it, and it was beautifully decorated. That is one of the places that I remember so distinctly. We were invited for weekends and would have a different suite of rooms, etc.

Q: I was just going to ask you, how did you get to know them?

BOGARDUS: They were very well known in diplomatic circles — they are both dead now — but interesting people, very interesting, but they were reduced to practically nothing, and had to come to the United States. They went to Florida for some reason, which seems

so remote from Czechoslovakia. It is remote, but I mean it seems so other worldly to Czechoslovakia which is, I think, just a beautiful country. And Florida — the part where they were — was really not very nice but anyway that's where they could make a living.

Q: We have your background in Prague, how you were absorbing all of this and not really thinking, as you said, of being an interior designer. Then Algiers. Did the Arabic design and color ...

BOGARDUS: That's interesting that you should ask me that because it always seemed alien to me, and it remains alien to this day. We did acquire a few things such as a very large, and very beautiful, copper tray on an Indian stand, with mother of pearl inlay — that sort of collapsible thing. And it was always collapsing to my horror, and the tray would fall over. There was just something about it that didn't seem to go with anything else that we already had. Mind you, we didn't have very much then. We had not acquired much in the way of furniture. I was just beginning to realize that there were goodies around. Unfortunately I didn't delve into the French things that I definitely would have found in Algiers. However, whatever I did get was French in origin rather than Arabic.

Q: When I was in Algiers 20 years later — about 20 years later — not posted, just on holiday, I didn't see the handiwork that I saw in Morocco and Tunisia but, the flea markets were just laden with massive pieces that the French had left behind when they fled.

BOGARDUS: Yes, and that's what happened in Saigon too. Not so much furniture, but much of the decorative arts type of thing. As I say, I wasn't quite at home with ... I was never at home, but I loved our house because the house was French. It was a French villa, and I have a picture of that too to show you — several pictures, I think it could have been absolutely lovely if they had done some planting outside, etc., but it was quite lovely. This is the entrance hall, which I loved. And my Biedermeier sofa, or settee, which I had found in Prague sitting outside the auctioneer place in the rain. I bought it for something like $2.50. It has since been sold, unfortunately. These are other pictures of Algiers. Our

lovely dog, Nina, who was a precious dog. This is General Mark Clark and Mrs. Clark, and my husband receiving him. We had 24 hours notice to do something about General Clark, and his wife, and his aide de camp who were arriving, and George was in charge. So we scurried around and had the use of the residence, thank goodness, and the servants there, so we put on quite a good party, I must say, with the French brass. This is a picture of Algiers as it used to be, it's probably much the same in that area.

Q: It's interesting. I guess the French influence in Algeria was really ...

BOGARDUS: Oh, greatly entrenched.

Q: More entrenched than in Tunisia then.

BOGARDUS: Oh, yes, I think so definitely. And, of course, when we were there the French were still in charge so unfortunately there was no question of our mingling with Arabs. That was a very great lacuna, I suppose you could say, because the Arabs we knew were our domestics, and people in the shops, but really didn't socialize with them because the French were there. And we had many good French friends, and I'm happy that we could meet them; different people, different outlook all together, for them the “outback”, I guess you could say. Some of them I understand are still there — one or two families are still there, but we no longer correspond with them so that's gone.

Q: So really Algiers didn't have all ...

BOGARDUS: ... all that great an influence except for the French culture.

Q: ... and then you went back to Toronto.

BOGARDUS: Then we went to Toronto, and I can remember when my husband came home for lunch one day in Algiers, and he said, “Dear, we have a new posting.” And I said, “Oh, where? Paris?” And he said, “No,” and I knew that something was not quite right, and I said, “Well, where?” and he said, “Well, I think you'll like it after a while.” I said, “Where?”

“Toronto,” and I said, “Toronto!” For a Montrealer, in those days, to be sent to Toronto was just not right. So I said, “I could never live in Toronto.” And he said, “Well, I'm sorry but that's where our next post is.” So I bit my tongue, and off we went. And actually Toronto was quite a landmark in our lives because our second daughter was born there, and I grew to like it very much because of the Canadians. Not so much because of our own people, who were all right. There was especially one couple with whom we're still very close. The rest of them had come to Toronto and stayed for many, many years. There was a different ruling in those days, you could stay apparently depending on the job, and had married Canadian wives. Anyway, we did get along beautifully with our Canadian neighbors and friends, and gradually I began to like it.

But I must say that after Margaret was born, I experienced one of the first real illnesses that were to plague me for the rest of our Foreign Service life. I had what they called postpartum depression, and it lasted for about eight months.

Q: Oh, really. It doesn't usually last that long, does it?

BOGARDUS: It did, and I decided on my own that nobody was really going to help me. I refused to go to a hospital because there I had this new baby, and Janet. Janet began to pose problems because she had been the queen bee up until then, and all of a sudden here was this little interloper who was taking all of mother's time because she was born very ill, almost didn't make it. So all that contributed to my depression, I must say.

Q: How old was Janet at that time?

BOGARDUS: Janet was seven, so you see she'd had a wonderful life all of her own. She was such a funny little child, she was so amusing, and full of wit and humor, and very talented. Anyway, that was a bad time. It was a very, very bad time of my life.

Q: How did you handle being really depressed, unable to get up and get out, and do what had to be done.

BOGARDUS: My next door neighbor, who was a wonderful woman, had sort of taken us under her wing. They were much older than we, and she had an invalid husband, and a very interesting Hungarian butler who sort of ran the house. She was very, very well to do, and she spent her time helping other people. She was a wonderful person, I loved her dearly, and she said to me, when Margaret was born, “You look awful.” And I said, “Thank you. That's the way I feel.” She said, “I'm taking you to my hairdresser for one thing. You had beautiful blond hair when I first met you, and what's happened to it? It's all dark brown.” So I said, “I don't know, I guess this too shall pass after a while.” But not according to Rene, something had to be done. So she had her hairdresser dye my hair, and I was afraid to come home. It was so bright and brassy, and I'd never had brassy blond hair before. And I thought, “Oh, mercy.” So I covered my head, and I crept in the house, and George said, “Oh, hello. How are you?” and never even noticed. From that day on I began to have my hair dyed, and then I thought, “This is becoming very expensive,” so I learned to do it myself, and I did until about ten years ago. Anyway, that began a very bad physical time for me.

Q: Did that have anything to do with Toronto being cold, and alien in a way?

BOGARDUS: Possibly it did.

Q: Did you have help in Toronto?

BOGARDUS: Yes, we did have intermittent help. This was very difficult to get ...

Q: Nothing like earlier in Prague. You must have had lots of help in Algiers.

BOGARDUS: We had good help, yes. We had a dear girl, 18 years old, and she came to us from the countryside. I think I told you about Mouina who wanted to be with us forever.

Q: Yes. I guess I'm just trying to pin down what was the cause.

BOGARDUS: I think it was physical, because one day the telephone rang and I couldn't get up to answer it. I literally could not lift myself from the chair, and my neighbor was on the telephone, and she finally came in. The door was unlocked, we didn't lock our doors then. She walked in, and she called me, and I couldn't even answer her. She came upstairs, and she saw me sitting there, and she said, “What is the matter with you?” And I said, “I don't know, I really don't know.” And she said, “All right, I'm taking you to the doctor.” “But the baby, there's nobody to look after the baby.” She scooped up the baby, Janet was in school, she took us both to her doctor who said, “Oh, dear.” He scheduled me for tests, and tests, and tests, and found out that my thyroid was not working. I was just really at a very low ebb, and it was mainly physical. You see, I'd been in Prague — oh, and I'd had a miscarriage in Prague, which was a very sad thing, and a horrendous experience in a Communist hospital, which I'd rather not go into. It was too awful. I think all of this was building up, and building up, and I'd been ill in Algiers too. I think I had my first bout of amoebic dysentery, and they didn't know what it was. And all of this just came to a head. And when Margaret was born, she had ... I forget what they call it, but it was something that babies get in the hospital. Anyway, she couldn't tolerate milk, she couldn't tolerate anything, and she almost died.

There again we had this wonderful nurse who took care of her, and a very fine young doctor. Margaret was his second successful case, so he brought her through — between the two of them they brought her through. I just didn't know what I was doing most of the time. And, of course, George, bless his heart, who is the epitome of good health, sane mind, just wonderfully reasonable, couldn't understand what was going on, and sort of gave up. Not that he gave up on me, but he didn't try to understand because he thought, “Oh, she'll come out of it. She has to,” because I'd always been in pretty good health, I mean basically very good health. So this went on, and on, and finally the doctor said, “I think she should go in the hospital.” And I said, “No, I will not.” And then I began being rather obstreperous even. Looking back on this I think I was just terrible. I acted very badly. However, I decided on my own that I was going to get out of this. If nobody

else could help me, I was going to do it myself, and I did. I forced myself everyday to do something, either to go to the library and look at something interesting, read something interesting. I forced myself to take care of the house, which I had not been doing. I made myself do everything, and gradually I came around. I also was greatly helped by our minister at the church, the Presbyterian church. I was greatly helped by him. I'm not madly religious, I'm not deeply religious, but I am definitely a believer, and this helped me a great deal.

Then came the news that we were going to be posted to Europe, and all of a sudden all this thing, this veil that had been hanging over me, was swept away. I was so busy, packing, making lists, doing things, learning all sorts of things about Germany. We found out it was going to be Germany, we thought it was going to be Bonn. So I said to George, “I am not going to be one of those Americans who sits in her apartment in Bonn, and talks only to the other American wives. I'm going to get out, and since I speak German, I'm going to get out and meet the Germans.'' And he said, “That's wonderful, I certainly intend to do the same.” We had all of this planned, and worked out in our minds, and we were on board the ship ... I think we had docked at Southhampton first ... and a telegram came for George saying, “Proceed to Hamburg.”

And George said, “How could this happen?” We were very new, well George was not terribly new, but I certainly was in the Foreign Service, and I thought, “How can they do this to us?”

Then we learned that Clare Timberlake had asked for George. He knew that he was going on leave very soon, and he wanted someone in there whom he knew, and who could speak German, and he knew George's qualifications. So he wanted him, and he got him.

Q: And got you in the bargain.

BOGARDUS: And got me in the bargain, yes. And there we were, and you know I was a different person. I was a completely different person. I was so interested in everything, and

this was where I began collecting; collecting porcelain, collecting glass, collecting anything that I could find that was 18th-19th century that I really loved. This opened up a whole new life. And there I began to think about decorating a little bit because we had a wonderful apartment ... did I show you? No, we haven't come to that yet. I have some pictures of the house in Hamburg which I think was just a wonderful ... this is doing my thank-yous. And this was the house that we had. It was a wonderful, wonderful house. There's an even better picture of it, I think. It was really choice.

Q: You had the second floor only, not the whole thing.

BOGARDUS: Oh, no. We didn't have the whole thing. Up here, of what had been the attic, was a charming apartment where the PAO lived, and on the ground floor we had another FSO and his wife. We had a terrace, and we had the use of the garden if we wanted it.

Q: Tell me about the repertory theater in Montreal, just as an aside.

BOGARDUS: Yes, going back a bit. I was thinking that my years in the Montreal Repertory Theatre were among the happiest of my life because I was able to fantasize, and be somebody else, and act like somebody else, and forget about myself, and it was such fun to do this. And I also ... I hadn't thought about this before, but I used to paint scenery and help to arrange the stage, the props, etc. In fact, I would do anything they asked me to do. I was even the prompter many times. All of that, I think, led to what I'm doing now.

Q: And then we leap ahead to Hamburg where you said you really started collecting, and really started thinking of your own goals, and your own personality.

BOGARDUS: Exactly, yes.

Q: You weren't in any way divorcing yourself from the Foreign Service.

BOGARDUS: Oh, no, I was even more entrenched. As the years went by I did more and more, and I enjoyed it. The thing is I do want people to understand that I enjoyed what I

did. It was not forced on me. It was something that I believed was part of the job. In other words, you get two for one — for the price of one. I really believe that had my husband been an industrialist, or even a shoe salesman, or whatever back home, I would have been doing the same sort of thing on a different scale, but it still would have been part of my job. So it was not forced on me, and I really enjoyed doing it. Unfortunately I didn't realize at the time that I should have, perhaps, been spending more time for myself, but it didn't occur to me.

Q: Well, there was plenty of time later to ...

BOGARDUS: There was time, yes, there was. I used to do things like — in Hamburg — taking the ferry boat down to the center of town, which took a long time, instead of taking the streetcar which I could have done. But the streetcar was not an interesting way to go, but this way I could look at all these patrician houses on the way, and the wonderful swans, and the bridges. It was just a charming scene, and I loved it. So those little things I did for myself. And what else did I learn in Hamburg that has stayed with me? I learned a lot about Meissen porcelain, for one thing, because there was a great store of it there to be had if you could find the right places. There was a wonderful street called ABC Strasse — ABC Street — where there was just one antique shop after another, and I knew all the proprietors, and they knew me, and it was such fun. They would put little things aside for me because they knew that I would be interested. And I bought many of our wine glasses there, the dark green Roemer, beautiful little things. You see them in paintings many times, the Dutch paintings, and a lot of Meissen porcelain.

Furniture, no, we didn't buy much furniture. The ironic thing was that in Hamburg we had this beautiful house, devoid of furniture, and we had very little at that time, and it took me a year and a half — we were only there two years and a half — to get three pieces of furniture from Bonn.

Q: Through the embassy.

BOGARDUS: It took me all that time of just digging away at the administrative officer. Finally, we got some furniture. I enjoyed Hamburg greatly. It was a fun place to be. The people were great. My parents came to visit us, and my mother said, “But you know this is so much like Montreal. I think I could even live here.” And I said, “But darling, you don't speak German.” “That's all right, I would learn.” And my father had his daily walk to get the newspaper, he could get a New York Times, or I guess the Herald Tribune, at the corner, and I said, “Daddy, how do you manage? You don't speak any German.” “Oh,” he said, “the lady up there is so kind. We have a nice chat every day.” To this day I don't know what they chatted in, what language it was, but they loved Hamburg, and so did we.

So then, after Hamburg, we had what I call the great letdown of coming back to Washington.

Q: Yes, where you had never ...

BOGARDUS: I had been in Washington, but only to visit George during the war when he was in OSS and was allowed leave from time to time, and I would come down from Montreal, or Des Moines, Iowa where his parents lived, to visit. I knew Georgetown because we stayed in small pensions in Georgetown, and I knew parts of Washington but not really to live in until we came back from Hamburg.

Q: I think we covered that last time, and that must have been when you worked at ...

BOGARDUS: At the Savile book shop. Yes, we did cover that.

Q: Yes, because it had something to do with a house, that you felt that you wanted to contribute to the rent.

BOGARDUS: That's right. This was probably my first show of great independence, if you will. I didn't do it in any militant fashion, I just said, “Now this is the way it's going to be. I can't stand this little house for four of us.” We were falling over one another, and I said,

“We can't have it this way.” So when I found this other place I decided that I would get a job, and I did. So that was a little show of independence, however small.

Q: Well, yes, and you'd been in the Foreign Service for 15 years then, about mid-career, and you were feeling your oats. But that was for two years, and then Saigon, and I see absolutely no oriental ...

BOGARDUS: Oh, yes. There are a lot of little things. If you look in there, the two panels, those are Vietnamese. The coffee table is Chinese. And there are many little bits and pieces, again of porcelain.

Q: But they blend into the overall European ...

BOGARDUS: That's right. Because those two chairs — in fact, there are six all together — and three tables with marble tops, are French, and I think I went into that. Did I not go into how I found them in Vietnam?

Q: No.

BOGARDUS: Oh, really. That was very interesting because I was convinced there had to be French furniture. There were plenty of French objects, etc., and lots of French influence in things, but no furniture, until — I think we had been there three years when we were invited to a Vietnamese professor's house, and walking down the stairs after his lecture on his Chinese furniture, and art objects, I looked out on the porch and I saw what I thought were Louis 16th legs sticking up under a bit of tarpaulin. And I said to the Vietnamese antique dealer, who had taken us there to this house, “What is professor so-and-so doing with this French furniture?” And he said, “Oh, he doesn't like that. He wants to get rid of it.” And I said, “He does?” And I almost fell down the stairs. George said afterwards, “Really, dear, it's very rude of you to go into someone else's house, and then expect to buy his furniture." And I said, “I was very careful about it. I let two weeks go by,” because this is what you do with an Asian person. You don't just plunge in and say, “I'll buy that,

and here's the money." You can't do that. You have to bargain, you have to lead up to it. So I led up to it by letting two weeks go by, and then I went over to the shop where I had bought a lot of things from Mr. Quay, and I said, "Mr. Quay, do you think the professor really wants to get rid of that furniture? And how much does he want for it, do you know." "Oh, I'm sure he would give it to you." And I said, "No, no. I don't want to be given it, I would like to buy it." Well, the upshot of it was that the professor was delighted that anyone was interested, and would we come over and look at it. So we did, and all I had seen were what I thought were perhaps three pieces of furniture, there happened to be ten all together: there was a settee, and the six chairs, and three tables. I said, "Oh, well, I'm afraid I won't be able to afford all this." "Oh, but I want you to have it." But I said, "We couldn't possibly do that." "Well," he said, "what can we do? I bought this from a French man who was fleeing in 1945. I did it just as a favor to him, and I don't think I spent very much money. I think maybe it would have been the equivalent of $25.00." So I looked at my husband, and he looked at me, and what to do? So I said, "Would that satisfy you? Or shouldn't we have today's market value?" "No, no. That's fine, that's wonderful." So we gave him $25.00 and we arranged for the embassy man to pick it up, and bring it all to our house. Two weeks later I drove by the professor's house, and there he was on his front steps with his wife, with his mandarin hat and robe — he always wore these, he was a hold-out from the old days — and there they were ensconced in the two metal beach chairs that they had bought with their $25.00. It was too funny for words. They loved them. They were red and white plastic, they were collapsible, and they had foot rests, and they were just in heaven in front of this old Chinese style house. It was just marvelous. So he was happy, and I was happy, and many, many hundreds of dollars later, after having all of the furniture stripped of its gray paint, and recaned, we are the possessors of all this French furniture. And we found out later that it was made for the Governor General's palace in Hanoi. There were many sets of this same sort of furniture, because we found another set for a friend of mine, and she bought it too. I forget where that was, but eventually it all began to come out for some reason or other. But that was very exciting.

So Saigon was a different place all together. Saigon was another world, and I'm not sure that I could ever go back there again because it was much too ...

Q: ... at a difficult time.

BOGARDUS: We were there during the build-up. We were there for a short time before the build-up, and that short time was taken up with trying to settle in, and trying to get used to the climate which was perfectly terrible, I thought. Yet, looking back though, we had a lovely house. Again we had one of those French villas, which I understand today has been razed because it was falling down from termites. We loved the house, and that was fun. And we had this wonderful family who took care of us, and they were just great people, we loved them dearly. All of that helped a great deal, but the whole life was so different for me. I never did get used to it, and I think if I lived there for a thousand years, I wouldn't be used to the climate, the way of doing things. Of course, there again there was still an awful lot of French influence. There was a great deal of it, and the French were still there. I mean they were there in their embassy, but of course, they didn't have the influence. They were no longer in charge.

I began to see this great build-up of troops even though they didn't wear a uniform you could tell they were marching down the Rue Cabinat with their short hair cuts, and their plaid shirts. I said to George, “Who are all these young American men? What are they doing here?” He said, “They're with the MAAG, the military advisory assistance group,” which gradually became MACV. It was a build-up that seemed inexorable. Then bad things began to happen, such as hand grenades thrown in your garden, for instance, and into restaurants, and that sort of thing. It made life very unpleasant. Then they began ambushing just outside the airport area where it began to be countryside. They would ambush anyone who drove out there. So that put a stop to going out of the city, except to fly out, which I tried to do as often as possible. I got off to Singapore twice to visit friends, and I went to Hong Kong three times. I just had to, because it was impossible to stay there and deal with things. And all of the time I was there I had amoebic dysentery. I had ten

cures. When I look back on it I don't know why I lived at all because I must have a very strong constitution.

I think I get that from my genes, my dear Scottish and German mother, and my English father. It was really just awful, and I began to think, “Well, this Foreign Service is asking a lot of the wives and the children.”

Q: And that was in the '60s, the early '60s.

BOGARDUS: Yes. We arrived there in January of '59 and in the same year was the first coup, and there was severe fighting right in front of our house. The second attempted revolt came in early 1961. Those were both pretty scary. We had home leave beginning in March '61.

Q: I wanted to ask you about your Saigon experience. We have talked about some of that before, but you said, “Well, I just really decided that maybe this Foreign Service was making too many demands,” and that was the early '60s. Did it occur to you that there was anything that you could do about that?

BOGARDUS: That's a good question, Jewell, a very good question. Yes, as a matter of fact it was during this time that George began to be very disillusioned about certain things in the Foreign Service, and I can't mention names even though these people are no longer alive, but I still feel I don't want to. Now this sounds like the usual cry. He was very unfairly treated at one point in his career, and it reflected on me, of course, and I was very upset about it. So one day we sat down and we talked about it, and we said, “We have a choice actually. We don't need to carry on in the Foreign Service.” It was all that he had ever known, of course. When he was 15 he decided that he would be an FSO, and so pursued his education and career in that way. He was very strong about it, strong minded, etc., and he loved it. He truly loved the Foreign Service, and I knew that he did. But I felt he could do a lot of other things, too. He's gifted in writing, etc., so anyway I said, “We could do other things. We could go back to the States, and I could get a job.” I wasn't

even thinking of interior design, but maybe that would have happened, “and you could do something different, it might be in government but anything to be different. Do you want to change?” And he said, “To tell you the truth, I don't really want to.” So I said, “All right, then this is what we have to do. We have to decide that we're going to go on, we're going to accept this situation, and we'll do the best we can with it, and if we choose to carry on in the Foreign Service we will not, not, be bitter, and we will not show it even if we feel it from time to time. We are not going to go about complaining," as so many people did. All around us people complained, in every post. It was amazing. So we made that decision, and it was at that point, I suppose, that I could have said, “Look, I've had it,” and physically I had, I really had. It was just too much for me. So we decided we'd carry on. So we came back to Saigon for a second tour.

Q: For a second tour. I wanted to ask you something. One of the criticisms, if you will, that the Schlesinger library has made of our tapes is that we're always talking about our husbands. Of course, they're taking a very feminist attitude. Well, fortunately, our New England representative, who went to talk to them about this, said, “But, that's what our life is. As Foreign Service wives our life is an extension of what our husbands do.” And I was fascinated by the fact that you said your husband's encounter, or whatever it was, reflected on you. It's exactly what happens.

BOGARDUS: Of course.

Q: Because you are defined by him in our Service.

BOGARDUS: That is true. But on the other hand, though, suppose we were in business, would we not feel much the same? I've often thought about this, you know.

Q: Yes, but you wouldn't necessarily be in the public eye.

BOGARDUS: No, that's true, unless your husband were a CEO, or something.

Q: Oh, no, I'm sure it's true in the ministry, it's true in the military, Congress. I wonder how a Congressman's wife feels when he's defeated, anywhere in politics.

BOGARDUS: Oh, I think that would be very hard to take.

Q: Well, because of the up or out system in the Foreign Service ...

BOGARDUS: Yes, I know. It does reflect on us definitely, it's bound to.

Q: I was just fascinated that you picked up on that point, "that reflected on me, and that's when I decided to do something about this."

BOGARDUS: Well, I did. I thought, "this too shall pass, I hope. I hope we won't be here forever because I don't think I could bear it."

Q: Saigon?

BOGARDUS: Saigon, yes. And I must say it was probably the one post when we finally left in July '63, the one post where I left happily, more or less happy. I was sad to say goodbye to our many, many friends who came to say goodbye to us at the airport. That part was extremely sad, but it was transitory, and I was looking forward to coming home, to seeing my family, to being back in what I called a normal post. And also I was looking forward, with tremendous interest, to our next post, which was Stuttgart. We had been given the usual list to fill out "where would you like to go?" as if it made any difference very often. But this time it did because George said, "We want Europe. We do not want an iron curtain country necessarily although we would take it. We want some place where we can speak either German or French, and that's what we would like, having had two tours of Saigon under the worst circumstances.'' So we were just delighted with Stuttgart, and it was wonderful for living, just general living, and sheer comfort, and pleasant surroundings. Stuttgart really takes the cake, as far as I'm concerned. Again, we had two tours of Stuttgart, which I loved.

Q: It was a nice aftermath of Vietnam.

BOGARDUS: It was an aftermath. I always felt as if it were a present to us, a treat. After you've had the bad part, then you get a little treat and Stuttgart was my little treat. I began collecting in earnest there because all over Germany, of course, are marvelous antique shops. I was very interested in the development of packages of decorating for the houses in Stuttgart. These houses where most of us lived were in a compound which is not ideal to my way of thinking, but they had been built and designed by a German architect and had been given a prize, and I never could understand why because they were little houses. They had no dining rooms to speak of, very difficult for entertaining, but we did a lot of different things. This is where I began showing some innovation, I suppose, and I made a dining room out of a bedroom, and did things like that. I myself wallpapered the entrance hall. I did a lot of things to that house and it was charming, I must say.

And I helped to make suggestions for the decorating of the places as things needed doing. There would be a choice of say three things, you could have a green, or a blue, or a gold color scheme, and that sort of thing. But there again I had to deal with the cheapest made in the USA fabrics. Today they can be very beautiful but then they weren't too good, but that was it. That was the word that came down from on high, you had to have everything made in the USA. We even had that in Saigon. We had a lady come out from Washington and look at our ...

Q: FBO? (Foreign Building Operations)

BOGARDUS: Yes, and she came around and she looked at everything, and she looked at the ambassador's house, which was a lovely place, and she was very, very, I thought, disrespectful because she criticized a lot of things that the ambassador's wife had done, which I thought were very pretty. And then she came into our house, and she said, “Oh, well, of course, this isn't too good.” And I said, “This is what we were given, this is GI, this is it. I agree with you, it's not very good but if you can get me something I'd be delighted

because all this stuff was mildewed when we first arrived," the cushions were mildewed, it was really awful. Anyway, that's another story. I think I got off the track a little bit there.

Q: You were doing housing in Stuttgart.

BOGARDUS: That's right. I was helping a little bit to suggest what to do, and I enjoyed that.

Q: You had the different color swatches and ...

BOGARDUS: Yes. They sent us samples of fabric that we could use, but with no real coordination, so I just set certain things aside, and said, "This would be nice, and that would be nice." That was my very first little job, you might say, and it was a help, I think.

Stuttgart was a real healing process. The first thing that happened to me was, since I still had this amoebic thing, I was becoming weaker and weaker, and while I was buoyed up by the fact that we were coming home, and I could be with my family, that passed rather quickly, and I began to feel quite, quite miserable again. Not this depression, but just physically awful, and I knew that something had to be done. So my parents were in Cape Cod ... well, first of all if I may go back a little bit because I think this had quite a bit to do with how I feel about life today. This was in between tours of Saigon. My husband had already gone back, and my younger daughter and I were due to go back as soon as she had finished her school in Cape Cod, and as soon as I had been able to be cleared by the State Department's health department. Well, I spent two hours sitting outside the doctor's office, and when I got in there finally, he said, "Well, you know I guess these tropical posts are difficult, aren't they?" And I said, "Yes, indeed they are doctor. Have you ever been in one?" And he said, "No, no, I haven't." "Well, it's not easy." And he said, "How do you feel?" And I said, "I feel absolutely awful." "Oh, my," said he. "Well," he said, "I have a suggestion," — now this is the absolute truth, it came out of the blue — he said, "I think I'm going to send you along to our psychiatrist." And I looked at him, and I said, "Psychiatrist? Why?" And he said, "You're having a lot of problems." "Yes, but doctor they're not up here,

they're down below. They ought to be taken care of. Can't I do something about it?" "Oh, well," he said, "no, you've had all those tests." And I said, "Yes, and they're all positive." "Oh, oh, I see. Well in that case," he said, "you're not living in Washington?" "No, I'm just here on a visit. I paid for this myself to come from Cape Cod to Washington. I paid for it. They never reimbursed me, and I said, "To be cleared I have to have your signature that I am well, and I'm not well. So what am I going to do about it?" He said, "I think you should go to the nearest public health hospital near your parent's place and be tested there, and hopefully be given a cure." So I said, "All right."I lugged my huge suitcase back to Brighton, Massachusetts, which was the closest one, and there again I waited for hours and hours. Nobody paid any attention to me because I was a civilian dependent, not only a dependent, but a civilian and this was all military. Finally I said, "I've got to have a bed somewhere. I can't just sit here for the rest of my life." So finally they found me a bed, and it happened to be in a double room, and the elderly lady sitting in the other bed reading magazines, etc., with the television blaring, she said, "Who are you?" And I said, "My name is Virginia Bogardus," and I was really quite defensive at this point. She said, "Are you going to be here in this bed?" And I said, "Apparently it's the only bed they can find. I'm terribly sorry if I'm intruding. I'll be very quiet." And she said, "Oh, well I certainly hope so." And I thought, "Who on earth is this?"

It turned out that she was the mother of the surgeon general of the hospital, and she was having a little rest cure. There was really nothing much wrong with her, but she was there having a lovely time, and the nurses were bowing and scraping, etc. So I said, "Oh, I wonder where I could put my clothes," because I had to get some night clothes out, etc. She said, "There's a small drawer over there. You can have that one, the rest are mine." "Thank you, so much." I squeezed my things in this drawer, and I didn't know what to do with the suitcase, it was a huge thing. So finally a nurse came along, and I said, "What do I do with this?" "Oh," she said, "just stick it in the closet." And the woman said, "No, no, she can't put it in there." I felt like an intruder. I thought, "Oh, dear what am I doing? What is wrong? Why am I not accepted here as a patient?"

Anyway, they gave me all sorts of tests, and they got down to the test which is the most painful, the liver test, and finally this young sergeant, Medico, said, “I can't find your vein.” I said, “I know, that's a perennial problem, I'm sorry.” There again I felt like a second class citizen.

Q: That it was your fault.

BOGARDUS: I don't have good veins.

Q: Is this what the Foreign Service had done to you.

BOGARDUS: It had. I thought, “This is terrible, when will it ever end?”

Q: ... second class citizen mentality.

BOGARDUS: Yes, I'd really had it at that point. Finally, they let me go without the final test, and fortunately I had my passport and my tickets. I had not relinquished my passport, which I should have done, but I had it. I just thought that something might happen, and I had Margaret's passport. So off we went to Saigon, still with this amoeba ...

Q: And no medical clearance.

BOGARDUS: And they accepted me back, who cares. “Oh, she's back. She can do the welfare work again.” And there I was, and another two years went by — a little over two years — and all of that dreadful business in Saigon which I really won't go into because everybody knows, it's history, it's all written there. Anyway, we came home and in order to get ready for Stuttgart I had to have a whole new wardrobe, and so did Margaret, and our older daughter too. That was a little difficult to find cotton clothes in the wintertime in Washington in those days. They weren't showing cruise clothes at that time. Anyway, we got ourselves partially equipped, and off we went.

And I arrived in Stuttgart really a basket case. I was at my lowest ebb ever.

Q: Exhausted, probably. You still had the amoeba?

BOGARDUS: Oh, yes. The upshot of it was, I went to a German doctor, a German lady took care of us. She was a wonderful, wonderful person. She was the sister of a friend of my father's, and when daddy said the children are going to Stuttgart, he said, “Oh, Helga will take care of them.” Well Helga did, and she was a life saver, and she took me to her doctor. Again, all these people ... here was a second benevolent person taking me to her doctor, this had happened in Toronto. So here again, he said, “Oh, well, you know what you need. You need to go to a cure,” a Kurort as they call them, “and you need to have a cure for at least six weeks. You're very ill.” Now, he did not say that he thought I had amoebic dysentery, he was just a sort of general practitioner, but I told him I thought that was ... he said, “Probably, I don't really know, but I think you ought to go, and I have just the perfect place for you.” So I said, “Fine, I'll do anything.” So I was all set to go and I came down with the measles — would you believe it? I had the 3-day measles.

They call it the 3-day measles in Germany, we call it the German measles, which I think is rather rude, but maybe it originated in Germany. All the children in the compound where we lived got it, and, of course, I did too, the only adult to get it. And I was so ill my fingers were like this, they were so thickened and inflamed. I was just a mess. And the doctor said, “Oh, my, you have some virus of some sort.” They didn't know what it was, besides the measles. He said this was not usual.

So anyway I got over that enough to get off to Murnau near Garmisch. A lovely little village in Bavaria, and there this very fine doctor, Dr. Busch, greeted me in his clinic, and he said, “You are very ill.” And I said, “Yes, I am,” and at that point I passed out. They took me in, they examined me, and he said, “You know, this is the most amazing thing. I used to be with General Rommel. I am an expert in tropical diseases.” And I said, “You are? Bless your heart.” He said, “I'm not sure how many, but you have at least one tropical disease

still.” He knew where I'd been, of course. I had told him that. And he said, “We're going to give you a cure.” And I said, “I've already had ten cures.” He said, “Oh. Did you have antibiotic with each cure?” And I said, “Yes, yes,” thinking that was a good thing. He said, “It's no wonder you're getting everything in the world. All your necessary bacteria have been killed off. I swear if you had not come to me now, I don't know how long you would last.” So there I was, and finally he gave me this cure that lasted 21 days, and it was the first cure I had ever had without arsenic. All the others had had arsenic, and I was really a mess physically.

But finally I began to feel better. I was a new woman, and in six weeks I went home and I looked the picture of health. I was completely cured, and from that day on I have been completely fine, and I owe it all to Dr. Busch.

Q: The State Department recognized your illness, and did what they thought they could for you, was that it?

BOGARDUS: Apparently, apparently. While I was in Saigon I was really a sort of guinea pig for all the different medications they would send out for these various tropical diseases. There was so much of everything, and practically every American who came there had a bout of dysentery, dengue fever, or some other thing. It was really quite appalling.

Q: But you must have been ill for five or six years.

BOGARDUS: I was. Not only was I physically ill, but that preyed on my mind. It gave me a different outlook. I still wasn't bitter, and I'm not bitter.

Q: No, I can tell that.

BOGARDUS: I really am not because I find on looking back, I think there was so much good that I absorbed, and so much wonderful experience that came to me, that I can't very

well say, “no, I hated it,” because I didn't. For the most part I loved it. But looking back in every single post I had some illness of one thing or another that really laid me low.

Q: Stress related, I would think.

BOGARDUS: Stress related, oh, yes. Why did I lose a baby in Prague, for instance. Probably because I wasn't getting the right food. We had no fresh vegetables, no fresh fruits for a year and four or five months — nothing but potatoes, and whatnot.

Q: How did you entertain.

BOGARDUS: Oh, my dear, spam was wonderful.

Q: Oh, no!

BOGARDUS: Oh, yes. Our first dinner party ... I never want to see spam again, thank you. But our first dinner party we had several cans of spam ... everything was in cans that we had sent to us. But that was not in the beginning, that was only after four or five months, and somebody said to the ambassador ... (End of tape 3, Side A)

... because I feel somewhat like you do too.

Q: Do you?

BOGARDUS: It was a great life, Jewell.

Q: Oh, it was. I wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world.

BOGARDUS: Nor would I.

Q: But what we put up with.

BOGARDUS: Yes, it's incredible, isn't it.

Q: Yes. I refer to the Foreign Service as a very seductive career.

BOGARDUS: That's an interesting ...

Q: Well, there is all the lure of the glamour, and the travel, and meeting people in high places.

BOGARDUS: Yes, of course. The lure, and the luxury of domestic help.

Q: Exactly. And I think there are a lot of us who have been carried along that way.

BOGARDUS: Oh, I think so.

Q: And the fact that our husbands were so devoted to the Service, and so wrapped up in it. Well, how would you feel if you said, "No, I'm going to go home. Let's give up this life." Well, I would feel guilty every morning over the breakfast table.

BOGARDUS: I would have, too. I often used to think about the French wives. They were particularly independent, amazingly enough. They would come out to a post, and they would stay for the holidays. They'd be there with the children for the Christmas holidays, for the Easter holidays, and perhaps for the summer. But the rest of the time they would not be in a place like ... well, who knows what, Prague, we'll say, or Saigon. They would prefer to be in France, thank you very much. And no one expected them to be present all the time, as we were, day after day after day.

Q: How did we bring that upon ourselves? Is that part of our American make-up, and American heritage?

BOGARDUS: I imagine it's part of the puritan ethic, or something. I don't know what it is, really. I never thought about it, but it seemed to me the French women were pretty cavalier about this. And some of the other diplomats' wives too. You rarely saw ... for instance, the Italian Consul General in Algiers, who was quite a character, his wife just never appeared.

We knew he was married because he had daughters who would come and visit, but she just thought, “Oh, Algiers was for the birds,” so she didn't come.

Q: Well, the British women came and went from Sierra Leone when we were there.

BOGARDUS: The British were more like the Americans, but even there some of them ... Q: In those days they were sending their children — and maybe they still do — sending their children home to public schools so young that the mothers really had a foot in both camps, at home and abroad.

BOGARDUS: They did. It was harder for them.

Q: Very hard, I would think.

BOGARDUS: Yes, I think so, but we certainly enjoyed Stuttgart after I became a well person. I just plunged into all sorts of activities. And I enjoyed that. I was just barely back from the Kurbad, when the new Consul General's wife came to visit me, which I thought was very sweet. She said, “Now, Ginny, I have a lovely assignment for you.” And I said, “You do? What is it?” “Well,” she said, “I think you'd make a very good president of the German-American Women's Club. And I looked at her in horror, and I said, “President! Good heavens, no.” “Why not?” she said, “I think you'd be perfect.” And I said, “Why aren't you president?” meaning that she being the Consul General's wife. “Oh, no, no,” she said, “I don't think so. No one ever has been before.” And I said, “There's always a first time.” But she persuaded me.

Q: Did you make her honorary president?

BOGARDUS: Yes. Oh, she was a darling person, I loved her — Katharyn Sweet, and I don't mind mentioning her name because they were just the finest people. It was their last post, and they knew it, and yet they plunged into every activity. They did everything they could think of for the good of the American Consulate General, and they made a wonderful

impression on the German people. They were just the greatest. And Paul Sweet was so fine with George and his ... you see, George had been in charge from the second day after we arrived in Stuttgart. George was in charge for months on end until Paul and Katharyn arrived. We'd had a lot of experience with meeting people, and making contacts, etc., so Paul would be very careful. He would say to George, “That's your man, isn't it? Just go ahead, you do it.” He never, never stepped on toes. He never intruded, but he also carried his full weight on everything. Whenever it was necessary, there he was. And to this day we still correspond with them, and love them dearly. So that was a nice thing, to have this memory.

Q: ... that last post of a pleasant memory.

BOGARDUS: Yes, it was a lovely memory, it really was.

Q: Your hesitancy to mention names ... so many people talk about the wonderful women they served with in the Foreign Service, and how much they learned from them, and what grand role models they were. I get the feeling that you didn't have that ... I didn't have it.

BOGARDUS: Well, I'll tell you. That's an interesting question because I think I told you before about Montreal where I grew up, of course, so to me it was not a post, although it was our first post. And the Consul General's wife there was a dear lady. She was absolutely wonderful, but she was completely intellectual. She was the best friend of my Latin and Greek professor, and the two of them got together at all times. Whenever they were free, this was their life together. So she had very little time really for the wives of the Consulate General. It was too bad. We loved her dearly. She was a sweet, jolly soul, but didn't ...

Q: She was pursuing her own agenda even then back in 1941.

BOGARDUS: She was, without realizing it, I guess. I really don't understand how this happened, but there it was. So I had no training whatsoever. I think I've already said this, haven't I?

Q: Yes.

BOGARDUS: And there certainly was no question of coming to Washington to have a course.

Q: There weren't any courses.

BOGARDUS: There weren't any courses. Well, they were just beginning, and I can't remember the name of the lady who ran it.

Q: At that point it should have been Cornelia Bassell, in 1941. Or Romaine Alling, but that would have been later. And I have never been able to pin down if there was a gap between Miss Bassell and Mrs. Alling. Mrs. Alling had been Cornelia Bassell's favorite student. And then after Paul Alling died, Romaine Alling was asked by Loy Henderson to set up some sort of course.

BOGARDUS: I remember that but, you see, by that time I was already out in the field.

Q: That must have been about the time you were in Toronto, or Algiers.

BOGARDUS: Algiers, probably.

Q: But before that it was either Cornelia Bassell, or no training at all as far as I can determine.

BOGARDUS: And there was no training at all for me, certainly. But, you know, when we got to Prague I simply listened, kept my ears open, and asked questions of a few of the older wives. I don't know, I think I was all right. I don't think I did anything bad.

Q: I don't think we'll worry about that.

We've now moved to the here and now, to the present, and moved you into your interior design role, and you were saying that you had some elderly clients.

BOGARDUS: I have a number of elderly clients in the West Chester, and the Kennedy Warren, and a few other places. And most of these people possess very nice furniture, mostly antiques. And for the most part they have very great taste, and somehow I've been able to please them because I think of how my mother would have reacted to certain things. They would be her age group, and her style. And I think, “Oh, yes, that would work.” They don't like innovative things, they like everything to be the same. Well, it doesn't turn out to be the same, but to them it is, because you can move to a certain extent into another phase, but you can't go too far. You just have to be very careful with these people. What they like is quality, and the very best of fabrics.

Q: What a delight to work with.

BOGARDUS: Oh, it is. It's wonderful, I love to do that. And I think that I enjoy working for Foreign Service people too, although strangely enough I haven't had too many Foreign Service people. I think simply because money is at the root of that. It's very expensive to decorate today. It really is if you want good fabrics, and good quality things, it's just terribly expensive. However, I have sources over the last 22 years. I've found a great many sources for things, for furniture, and fabrics. So I can manage to give discounts to my clients.

My first client, 22 years ago, has had her house done three times, the entire house. We've done it over for the third time, and in the process she's become a very good friend, a very close friend. We had a wonderful time starting off. I think I mentioned that in the last talk.

Q: I don't remember you mentioning it.

BOGARDUS: How I got started in the business?

Q: Well, tell me. I seem to remember most of what you said, but I don't remember this exactly.

BOGARDUS: I finally decided when we came back from Stuttgart, that I had to do something for myself. And once we got our younger daughter established at Walt Whitman, the days were rather long and heavy, and dreary, and I thought, “I've got to do something.” So, I was talking with an artist friend of mine who was with us in Saigon, and had become a very close friend, and I said, “I'd really like to do some interior designing.” And she said, “Do it.” And I said, “But, Ruth dear, I don't know how to start.” She used to be with Portraits, Inc., in New York, so she knew all the angles, the business side of it. And she said, “I'll tell you how to get started. Do a couple of rooms for me, and then I will show them to friends ...”

Q: Yes, you did tell me this. I just didn't know where it had come from.

BOGARDUS: That's how it got started, and this first client called me two weeks later, after seeing the rooms that I had done, and said, “I want you to do my house.” And I was terrified because, what had this friend of mine gotten me into. However, that's how it started, and I've just gone on from there. And I've never really been without a client at any one time. It's just word of mouth, and it works that way. And mostly my clients are very private people.

This is interesting though. I might have had the chance of doing something for Clair Booth Luce before she died. I just don't know. I was approached by one of her secretaries, and I said, “Of course, I'd be happy to do anything.” And then I waited and waited, and nothing happened. And then it turned out that she was quite ill, and had had a few things done but as it turned out they were done by my upholsterer and my draper, and I saw these chairs in his workshop, and I said, “Oh, how did you get those?” And he said, “The secretary

called me.” That was all right. It probably wouldn't have come to anything much, but it would have been interesting. I would have been very happy.

Q: When you said your people are mostly private, you mean as opposed to public, rather than private ...

BOGARDUS: No, I mean they're people who are of the old school in Washington. What do they call them? The cave dwellers, and so they don't like to have people know ... they want people to think the chairs have just grown there. “Certainly we did not have a decorator.” So I go along with that. I wouldn't have a decorator other than myself, simply because I have very definite ideas on what I like. Also, I do not like to have a place look decorated. I cannot stand that. A room has to reflect a person's emotions, a person's interests, and a person's daily life. Not just looking like House & Garden.

Q: Do you sit down and talk with them?

BOGARDUS: Oh, yes, for hours. We have a number of chats, and consultations, and then I show them fabrics, and pictures. Also, I take them around, if they want to. I prefer not to have them come when I'm getting samples of fabric because that's very distracting. But they have to sit on furniture. If they're buying a chair, for instance, or a sofa, they have to sit on it so they know it's comfortable, and that sort of thing. It's an interesting process. It's somewhat like being a therapist, in a way. You have to hold their hand, and say, “Now, it is going to be fine. I assure you it will be good, and you will like it.”

Q: And in the end they think the decision was theirs?

BOGARDUS: Oh, absolutely.

Q: Here, getting into the finances.

BOGARDUS: Yes. Well, you know, I really chose that fabric, and I really did this ... This is very true, particularly of husbands. I have to be very careful working with husbands. First

of all, I prefer if there is a husband and wife team, I prefer to talk with the wife first and get her ideas, because she more often than not is the one who says how it's going to look. Sometimes you get it the other way around, and the husband is the one who has the eye for this, and that, and the other thing, and that is difficult sometimes. But convincing the husband that what you and the wife have chosen is the right thing, is not easy. And what you do there is, you leave something over a weekend, and you say, “Just leave it on the chair and see what you think.” And Monday you call and say, “Well, what did he think?” “Yes, it's all right, he's amazed that you can put a stripe on a oriental carpet.” I said, “Of course, you can do anything you want, really, if the scale is right, and the color is right.” So then you put the strip on the dining room chairs, and there's sort of a wildly colored oriental rug — actually, at best a very Arabian rug which has very strong colors, and strong designs, and this nice bold stripe picking up some of the colors in the rug, looks terrific. And, the next time you hear this person say, “Oh, well, of course, how do you like our dining room chairs? Aren't they great? I chose that.” I looked at his wife, and we chuckled because it was as if he had said, “Go out and get me a stripe.” It was wonderful.

Q: But once you gave him the stripe, it became his.

BOGARDUS: His stripe, absolutely. It was lovely. And so often this works. I tell you, I'm not a very good business woman. I never have been, and I've never pretended to be, and my husband keeps saying, “You really should charge more. You're not keeping up with today's market.” And I said, “No, because if I did, I would probably not get any more jobs, really.” Most designers I know add 20 percent onto labor, and I do not. If something is very, very inexpensive, I might tack on a few dollars just for the sake of it. But most of the time the labor costs are just for the people who do them. And I make my money on the fabrics, and on rugs, and furniture, or accessories. And I look for antiques for people. That's my favorite ...

Q: Do you do that by the hour, or how do you do that?

BOGARDUS: Yes. If I'm actually out looking for antiques, then I do have to charge by the hour. Or charge a finder's fee, and if I find a piece of furniture at retail, then I just put on a few dollars for a finders fee because otherwise I'd make nothing and that would be it. It's amazing how many hours can be spent looking for things, and rejecting certain things because they don't meet all the requirements. But you see, you save your client all these hours drudging about, driving miles ...

Q: And you know where to go and look, and they don't.

BOGARDUS: I know where to go, that's right. And many hours on the telephone. I have sources everywhere, up in New Hampshire, up in Massachusetts, and all over the place, San Francisco. And even at one point I had some in Germany, but I haven't done that recently, it's become too expensive. To me, this whole thing grew out of a love of antiques, and collecting things.

Q: And the opportunity in the Foreign Service to be over there where the antiques were.

BOGARDUS: That's right. To be on the spot, that was a wonderful thing, it was a boon. And I'm only realizing it now to its fullest extent, that very few designers that I know now coming out of design school, these young things, very gung-ho and probably better equipped technically than I might be about all sorts of things like fire regulations, and ... oh, I don't know, just all the bothersome regulations that you have to go through when you're doing anything that is not just purely residential, they're very good at that. But they do not have the background. They can't possibly, and that's where I crow a little bit, if I may, because I do have all that background.

Q: Wonderful experience.

BOGARDUS: So I'm deeply grateful to the Foreign Service for that. I really am. And it's interesting how things balance out. If you stop to think about it one's life does balance out. There are all kinds of things that are so good that they outweigh ...

Q: But I think that's partly you as a personality weighing things. Like you said in Toronto, "I'm just going to bring myself out of that depression." That was probably ... maybe the most basic experience like that that you had.

BOGARDUS: The worst job I've ever had, frankly, it really was. I just made myself do it. So I know that I can if I want to. I've since then become a very lazy person and if I don't want to do something, I don't do it.

Q: Oh, I don't think that's laziness. I think that's the wisdom of age.

BOGARDUS: Oh, I hope so. I hope it's the wisdom of age and not the awful accompanying ...

Q: The by-product.

BOGARDUS: The by-product.

Q: I think not. You were going to talk about the influence that your grandmother was on your life.

BOGARDUS: Yes. My grandmother was German-American, and a very wonderful woman, very much, as they say, a pillar of the church and spent a great deal of her time doing things for others. And my mother was one of the most devoted daughters I have ever known. She looked after my grandmother when grandfather died. I think of that house where I grew up, the house that my grandfather built ...

Q: Because your parents moved in and never moved out.

BOGARDUS: That's right. When we arrived back from Buffalo, I was a year and a half, and my grandfather took one look at me — his first grandchild — and said, “Oh, how wonderful. Well, you can stay with us now, there's plenty of room for everybody.” And mother said, “Yes, but dad, we are going to look for our own place.” “Oh, yes, yes, but time enough for that.” Well, the time stretched on to many years, and I lived there for 24 years of my life until I was married.

I loved the house. It was a very simple Victorian house, very tall and slender, with a back garden, and a side driveway, and hollyhocks grew along the driveway. The garden was lovely. It had a big high wooden fence all around it, and my mother had a green thumb. So whatever she planted, just flourished abundantly. It was actually a very gloomy house because it had dark wood paneling, and was really quite lovely. In the entrance hall we had a rather hideous dark green Spanish leather wall covering. Probably today, if you could find it, it would cost the earth, but to me it was just dreadful. And we had flowered stair carpeting, with brass rails — stretchers. It was really wonderful in its way. And over the doorway from the entrance hall, into the back hall, and the butler's pantry, was a huge moose head which used to frighten the life out of me. So when I had to come from the kitchen, or go into the kitchen from the hall, I would run like mad and the swinging doors behind me would be making a clattering noise. And I loved it all.

Anyway, my dear grandfather, who was my best friend until I was eleven years old, a true Scotsman, Donald Monroe Campbell ... when Donald died a part of my life went with him. Amazingly, I didn't realize it at the time but as I grew older, I did. I missed him terribly, and to this day, I keep thinking, “Oh, I wish he had known George.” I think he would have loved George, and that sort of thought keeps reoccurring to me. Anyway, Grandpa died, and so mother thought, “Oh, now is my chance to do something about this house,” which was so gloomy. So she painted the woodwork white, and she painted the walls in the living room and the back parlor a lovely, what today we would call a Williamsburg blue. And she hung English chintz at the windows with large cabbage roses, and she slipcovered the

chairs in chintz in a lovely shade of rose, etc. It was just charming, absolutely charming. And everybody said, “Oh, we've never seen anything like this, but your father would probably be turning over in his grave.” And mother said, “Well, probably, but dad loved me and said 'you'll go far, dear, one of these days'.” And she said, “This is about the farthest I think I'll ever get.” Dear Mother. She was the most wonderful woman, and I just adored her. She was such fun, and so great. She was only 20 years older than I, and we were really like good friends, although there was always a great respect. It was not just being friends because I don't believe in that between parents and children. I think parents should be parents as well as friends, and mother remained a good stern parent, actually. I remember those things that she did to the house, and looking back on it, I really think that she probably was my mentor without my realizing it. And, of course, the first person I told, when I got my first job, was my mother who was at the time living in Cape Cod.

Q: When you got your first decorating job?

BOGARDUS: Yes, and she was absolutely delighted, just delighted, and every time I got a new job, I would show her the samples and the various components of this job for her approval. She was always absolutely right on certain things.

Q: And she had no training?

BOGARDUS: No, none whatsoever.

Q: Art school? Anything at all?

BOGARDUS: No, no. My mother was the middle one in the family of four — two boys and two girls — and the sun rose and set on the boys as they were called, “the boys” even into their young manhood, they were referred to as “the boys”. And whenever decisions were made about what food they would have on the weekend, and special occasions, “well, what would the boys like?” It was an interesting thing. I grew up with this feeling that, “oh, yes, men were very important.” You see, it started with my grandfather because

he was an old person — to me he was old — he was probably in this fifties at that point, but he had white hair, and he was very ... well, he wasn't a fatherly person in that he doted on the children, but he liked me. For some reason or other we had a great feeling of comradeship. We understood one another, and he would allow me — the only person in the household — he would allow me to interrupt his nap in the afternoon, which of course was a terrible thing to do. But I would tap on the door, and I would be all dressed up in my mother's clothes, you know with a feather boa, and a hat, and her heels and go clacking down the hall to my grandfather's study, and I would say, “Mr. Campbell?” And he would say, “Yes, is that Mrs. Smith?” And I would say, “Yes, it is. I've come for tea.” And we would go through this routine in the afternoon, and if mother were around, he would say, “Oh, yes, Mrs. Smith has come to call. Would you bring us tea, please.” And mother, going along with this game, would bring us a little tray with tea cups, and cookies. It was marvelous. I remember all these things, and we had grown-up conversations. I would sit there with my boa and we'd talk about the weather, and where I lived — oh, it was the town of Mt. Royal, where eventually my own parents built a house actually. It was a new suburb at that time, it was very new. It was thought to be rather way out, very modern, very contemporary, and if you lived in the town of Mt. Royal you were really something. So I came from the town of Mt. Royal to visit my grand ... Mr. Campbell. Isn't that marvelous?

Q: That's wonderful.

BOGARDUS: And all these thoughts over the years have really sustained me. They're part of my background. He was completely Scottish and a wonderful man. He owned a pulp and paper mill in Quebec. He used to take Grandma there for two or three days at a time, and they would visit the loggers. They had a pet bear who used to come and look into the window ... into the eating porch where all the loggers would be sitting having their lunch, and the bear would come and look at them, and somebody would give him something to eat. Finally he got to be too big so they had to let him go, and keep him away from the campsite. All of these things I remember being told, and experiencing.

Q: Well, it seems to me that you took that fantasy world first to the theater in Montreal, and then into decorating.

BOGARDUS: That's right. The two things were almost parallel, but I didn't realize it. What is so odd is that I just didn't do this sort of thing compulsively, or ...

Q: Or with a purpose.

BOGARDUS: No, I didn't because I'm really a drifter, I guess, but I've been lucky. I've been lucky in that I've drifted in the right direction.

Q: I think it's more than just drifting.

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BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: George Frederick Bogardus

Spouse's Position: Executive Officer, Economic Officer

Spouse Entered Service: 1941Left Service: 1969You Entered Service:1942Left Service: Same

Status: Spouse of Retiree

Posts: 1941-44Montreal, Canada 1945-48Prague, Czechoslovakia 1948-50Algiers, Algeria 1951-53Toronto, Canada 1954-55Hamburg, Germany 1956-58Washington, DC 1959-62Saigon, Vietnam 1963-66Stuttgart, Germany 1967-69Washington, DC, POLAD, Department of Defense

Place/Date of birth: 1918, Buffalo, New York, but grew up in Montreal

Maiden Name: Webb

Parents:

Arthur Dorothea Webb, Investment Banker

Dorothea Webb

Schools (Prep, University):

Weston School (Secondary/Jr. College), Montreal

McGill, but transferred to art school Also studied at Montreal Museum of Art under Sir Arthur Lismer, one of Group of Seven, Canadian artists famous for landscapes

Date/Place of Marriage: December 1940, New York City (Some problems as dual national)

Children:

Janet (living in San Francisco)

Margaret (living in Philadelphia)

Profession: Interior designer

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post: Little Theater, Decorating; Informal meals on wheels, Montreal; Welfare Committee, German-American Women's Club, Hamburg; American Women's Club (orphanages, school for the blind, crisis relief, i.e., provided clothing for survivors of destroyed villages) Saigon; President, German-American Women's Club (helped to restore welfare assistance committee, i.e., orphanages, senior citizens, bazaar), Stuttgart.

B. Washington, DC: Received and catalogued books, Savile Book Store, Washington, DC (paid); -Co-chair, Arts Committee, Westmoreland Congregational Church, Washington, DC (Fund raising for needy).

End of Interview